

Father Garesché
EVER TIMELY
THOUGHTS





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EVER TIMELY THOUGHTS

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EVER TIMELY THOUGHTS

Cheerful Considerations on
Facts of Enduring Worth

BY

REV. EDWARD F. GARESCHÉ, S. J.

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Dedication
TO THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
HOUSE OF GOLD

PREFACE

THOUGHTS of a sort are tossed about nowadays thicker than the leaves in Vallombrosa. They are wafted to us on the wings of the wind that blows from gigantic printing presses. Voluminous magazines and corpulent Sunday supplements purvey ideas of a kind to all who will read them, and the number of such readers is infinite. Yet the thoughts which are thus supplied to our too-patient modern multitudes can scarcely be called ever-timely thoughts.

They are timely, or at least they are given the stamp of timeliness for the moment while the periodicals which carry them forth are wet from the presses. They bear a momentary appeal. But look over the files of some of these commercialized publications and see where are the thoughts of yesterday, much more of yesterweek and yesteryear. They have faded with the times that gave them birth.

The thoughts which we seek to convey in the little papers which make up this volume are of another kind, and do not owe their timeliness to the happen-

ings of the moment. These are indeed ever-timely thoughts because they are thoughts which rise from earth toward eternity. All of us have need in these whirling days to anchor our hearts and our minds betimes on some solid and enduring reflections lest we should become as changeful and unstable, of as unsubstantial a mind as the current literature we feed on.

Like its predecessors of the same series, this book offers its readers wherewithal to pass profitably, and it is hoped pleasantly too, some of those moments when one can take up a book for a bit of quiet reading. Not to the credit of the book, but rather to the worthiness of its subjects, is due the ever-timeliness of its thoughts.

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EVER TIMELY THOUGHTS

THE WILL OF GOD

THERE is a vast consolation in meditating with faith and trust on the great will of God and how it is unerringly accomplished in all the changes of this mortal world. There is yet more of comfort and assurance to be had from joining our poor, weak and fickle wills most utterly to His, and thus borrowing, so to say, the strength and the sureness of Omnipotence itself. Did we but understand all that is contained in Our Lord's prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," the "Our Father" would be to us still more a well of sweetness and of strength. In times of trial as in times of peace think much upon the will of God, and grace will flow into your soul.

Let us recall for a moment some of the great truths which our holy Faith teaches us concerning the will of God and its accomplishment. God is omnipotence itself, and nothing whatever is in the least perplexing or difficult for Him. He speaks, and the universe is made. He commands, and all things are created. What seems difficult, compli-

cated, desperate even, in the affairs of men, in the fate of the Church, in the intricacies of the history of individuals and of peoples, gives Him not the slightest trouble to solve and to adjust as He pleases. Even the free will of man, which He respects so completely during this time of probation on earth, cannot baffle or defeat His plans. Creator and master of heaven and earth, He rules by His own right and His own power, blessed and sure in all things and forever.

Consider next the all-wisdom of God. In His own essence, by His own power, He knows all things perfectly, past, present and to come, actual and possible. With a single glance He comprehends the entire universe. He knows, not alone what is, but what is to be, and what might be if other conditions existed. Not only the fixed motions of necessary causes, of the unreasoning world of things, but also the actions of intelligent beings, of free creatures, of all men and women who are or shall be or might be on earth, are completely known to Him, and in one look, so to say, He sees them all. Nothing escapes His notice, nothing can deceive or elude His knowledge, for of His own self He knows all things, and knows them perfectly as they are, to the last atom and in the most perfect degree.

From all eternity God has known all things. In all eternity He considered the universe which He

wished to create. It was all before Him in all its details. While our poor and weak intelligence grows bewildered at the thought of this knowledge of God, and conjures up difficulties which it cannot fully penetrate or solve, this fact is clear—that there is no happening on earth, no circumstance in the lives of ourselves or of other men, which God has not foreseen, and, for reasons good in the sight of His wisdom and mercy, allowed to come to pass for His glory.

This thought is a source of immense comfort to us in bearing the trials and sorrows of life. There is no single one of all the misfortunes that befall us, the pains that try us, the temptations that vex and the losses that sadden us, but was weighed, examined, considered, and allowed to occur for our good and for His glory by the all-merciful, all-loving and all-wise God. In His omniscience He foresaw them, in His mercy He considered them, and in His love He sent them to us to be ministers of His will and opportunities of grace and merit to us. Nothing can come to pass in our regard, however great or small, that has not first, so to say, gone through the hands of God.

Look at your life in the light of this thought and see how it illumines and glorifies all things, even every trivial detail of your days. That sorrow which presses on you, it is a painful and hard thing

in itself, but God has wished from all eternity that you should bear just that special sorrow for His love. He has estimated the difficulty of enduring it patiently, has supplied for you the graces you need to offer it up with resignation to Him, and He looks to you to be brave and patient and loving under it and to trust Him to relieve you when it has done all the good He wishes in your heart. It is therefore a blessed sorrow, because it comes to you from the hands of God, and you well may say with St. Francis Xavier, "Lord, let not this trial pass away until it has done all that You desire in my soul."

Consider all the little things that come to pass in a single day of your life, the little vexations that give you chances to practice patience, the little opportunities for service to others that offer you occasions of exercising charity, the small openings for a kind word, an encouraging glance even, which the hours bring. There is no one of them all but was foreseen and permitted by God from all eternity. To us, limited as we are in our attention, memory, intelligence, it is amazing that God can so attend to every slight circumstance of our every moment. But in God's sight there is no little or great. With a single glance He comprehends all things, and the endless details of the universe no more distract His attention one from the other, than do the multitude

of objects that it shines on dim or bewilder the clear light of the sun.

One may say the same of all the circumstances which surround us, of all the things which befall us, of all the contents of our days on earth. As far as we are concerned, it is the will of God that we should accept what He sends us, should use what He gives us for His glory and the good of our own souls, should work where He has placed us and with the means and opportunities which He has provided for us, until at last He calls us in the way and at the time that He wills, to render an account of our stewardship. We are immersed, so to say, in the holy will of God. We are surrounded by the evidence of His will. We need only to look about us to see precisely in what circumstances He has meant to put us, what chances He has wished to give us, what temptations He wants us to overcome, with what tools He means us to carve our souls to His image, by what ways He means to lead us to heaven.

For if God had willed to make us other than we are, He could have done so. If He had chosen to put us in other circumstances, we should be there. If He had liked to have us endowed with more talents, we should have been given them. Being what we are and where we are, we see God's will written large on everything about us. Because God can do all that He wills, and because the will of God gov-

erns the universe most perfectly and completely, it is sure that whatever occurs comes to pass because He has willed to allow it, and hence there is nothing that can draw near us but upon it we may see written the evidence of God's will.

Trials pursue us, and we shudder to see them approaching, but as they come to us we may recognize upon them the stamp and the seal of God's will. Opportunities run up to us in the way of life, and as they come and pass we may see written again upon them the sign of God's will. Why should He have allowed trials to arrive, but that they might prove and sanctify us? Why should He permit us to be tempted, but for our merit? Why should He arrange from all eternity that chances of doing good should be opened before us, but that we might use them for His service now and our soul's glory hereafter? If we will make the effort vividly to realize how completely the whole universe is in the power of God, how utterly His adorable will controls all things, how impossible it is for even the slightest incident of the most insignificant day to escape His notice and His forethought from all eternity, then we shall begin feebly to appreciate how clearly the will of God is stamped on every detail of our lives.

God deals with His creatures according to their nature. The unreasoning world of minerals and plants and animals. He rules by means of natural

laws, swaying all things with a necessary rule, and keeping all in order and harmony so that the universe may continue and the designs of God may unerringly be accomplished by these myriads of creatures incapable of reason or of self-governance. So, under the sway of these natural laws, the great stars swing inevitably in their orbits, the currents of the sea cleanse the shores, the air clothes and nourishes the forests, the plants of land and of ocean feed their sentient inhabitants, the fauna of the lands produce and continue each its kind, and thus the world is kept fit as an abiding place for man, man the apex of all the pyramid of visible creation, whose willing service is to glorify God, and whose intelligence is to comprehend and to praise the wonders of His works.

With man, a free and intelligent being, God deals otherwise than with His merely material creation. With man, besides the laws of nature which rule his animal part, there abide the freedom of will and power of understanding by which he can obey the moral law, written by God in the tablets of his heart. So God leaves man free, scrupulously respecting the power of free choice which He has given the created human will. During all of man's probation on earth, even to the last instant of his days of trial before he is summoned to the judgment, he is free.

It is easy to see how God's will is inevitably carried out by the inanimate world and by the brute creation. Necessary laws rule every motion and instinct there, and in fixing these laws and foreseeing their results throughout the ages God inerringly provided that His holy will should be carried out forever. Whatever is the result of these necessary laws is therefore according to God's desire. But it is not so easy to understand how even the free actions of men manifest to us God's will in our regard. For these are determined by men's own wills, and they are too often in direct disregard of the moral law which declares God's will within their hearts.

But we must remember that God knows and foresees from the beginning the actions of all men. How God knows them, we cannot fully understand, for we cannot fathom the nature of the Infinite. Neither can we comprehend the unerring completeness with which, at a single glance, the intelligence of God comprehends all things, actual and possible, past, present and to come. Yet we know by reason and the teachings of the Church, that God does so comprehend all things whatsoever. Hence He knows from all eternity even the free actions of men, and sees what each one will freely do at such a moment, under such and such circumstances, in all the complex history of the world.

From all eternity, therefore, God has taken into

account not only every smallest result of the operation of the natural laws, of the course of the seasons and the stars, of the growth and death of plants and animals, of the life of our bodies and the material circumstances about us, but He has known with equal clearness and considered with equal wisdom every free action of those about us, whether good or evil. The good actions He approves and desires, the evil ones He hates and abhors. But since man's will is free he is free also to sin. God allows the evil actions of men, and makes them result in His greater glory and the good of His friends. For so infinite is the power and goodness of God, that even though He abhors and punishes all that is evil, He still can secure His own greater glory and the good of those who serve Him. The wickedness of evil men often supplies the trials which perfect the good.

We may be sure then, in any moment of our lives, that God has foreseen every tiniest circumstance, even the unkind actions of those about us, and has allowed it to come to be for the purposes of His eternal love and wisdom. To us life sometimes seems but a haphazard of queer chances, a "dance of shifting circumstance." But to God nothing is by chance, nothing is unforeseen or unallowed for. With us the favorite comparison for life is the ocean, with its wide, dangerous solitudes, its

shifting tides and contrary currents, and the innumerable waves that change and run on its unstable floor. But to the eyes of God every wave has its place and its mission, the winds obey His will and the currents do His bidding, and if we love and trust Him and serve Him faithfully He will surely bear us across the waters into the harbor, the safe and sheltered haven of bliss that never ends.

It is not hard to learn in theory the truth of the provident foreseeing of God, nor to believe that all things are indeed subject to His will. We readily admit too, in theory at least, that all things that occur to us, whether from the working of inanimate nature or by the choice of men, are a manifestation of His holy will in our regard, since He has willed to allow these things to come to us and He can have but one motive that is worthy of Him—that is to say, His own greater glory and the salvation of our souls. We believe these things very firmly. But to reap from this belief the consolation which it should contain for us, we must go further and realize in each detail of our lives its practical application.

A sorrow comes to us. Perhaps it is from the workings of inanimate nature, perhaps from the wicked wills of men that the calamity has arisen. No matter how or whence it has come, it cannot have reached us without the permission of God. It

is He that has foreseen it from eternity. In His infinite knowledge, which no detail can escape, He has examined it most comprehensively. He knows, endlessly better than we, its exact nature, consequences, duration. He gives us the grace we need in order to act as He wishes. It is part of His infinite plan for our salvation, that this precise experience should reach us at this special time of our lives. If we realized all this, how easy it would be to say, "God's will be done," not only with resignation but with joy, for God's will is our salvation and sanctification, and He has surely allowed this to come to pass so that we may go higher in heaven.

An opportunity opens before us to do some good work, to help some holy enterprise, to practice some precious virtue. To us it may seem that this opportunity has come by chance; it arose out of some shift of events; or perhaps we arrived at it by reason of our own previous actions. What difference if we, being slothful at the time or indisposed to that particular bit of well-doing, neglect it and let it pass? But think for a moment. This opportunity is the result of God's eternal planning for us; it is a gift to us from His singular love; He looks to see how we shall use what He has prepared through so many ages. If we realize all this, we shall be more solicitous, surely, that no part of God's good gift shall overpass us.

We may readily apply the same reflection to every incident of our lives. Temptations come to us only after God has foreseen and allowed them, and each has its purpose in proving and perfecting us according to His holy will. Good fortune is not "fortune" at all in the first sense of the word, but a gift from God which He has been intending to send us, according to our way of speaking, from all eternity. So, little things and great, hard things and easy, are forever bringing to us messages of the holy will of God.

Think on these things in moments of depression when the soul needs consoling thoughts to nourish its courage and its hope. Close the eyes of the flesh and open the eyes of the spirit, so as to see, not the dull, disheartening appearance of things, but the great reality of God's governing will working out forever the high purposes of eternal love. Then, with faith and hope and love, conform your will to the will of God, saying, in the prayer indulged by the Church: "May the most just, most high, and most lovable will of God be done, praised and exalted for all eternity!"

OUR TASTES

IT HAS been shrewdly remarked that our use of leisure is often more important and indicates our character more surely than the regular work whereby we get a living. The conditions of modern life force certain occupations on a great number of people, and thus they gain their livelihood in ways which are more the result of necessity than of their own free choice. They turn their hand to this or that because this or that position is open to them, not because they prefer it. Even those who enter on special trades or professions often do so more as the result of circumstances than from any very strong personal preference. But the things we do between times, the friends we choose, the company we keep by preference, the amusements we delight in and the books we love to read, these are in greater measure the indication of our personal preferences. They smack of our individuality. They indicate our tastes. They give an index to the precise kind of person we have made ourselves.

Our personal tastes and preferences in the matter

of friends, of amusements, reading, and so on through all the catalogue of the occupations of our leisure, are of vast importance because they intimate so clearly our own character and viewpoint. But our tastes in all these things have an even greater importance because they constantly determine and mold the outlines of our disposition. The daily task by which we gain our living has indeed a notable influence upon us. Doing the same work, day after day, elicits certain habits, stimulates definite faculties, makes prominent some features of our talent and lets others rust from habitual disuse. Just as a blacksmith grows burly with swinging hammers and heaving bars, and a farmer stiff and heavy of tread from walking in plowed fields, so those who are engaged in less material occupations, are molded to some degree by what they work in. Routine in stores and factories tends to dry up original thought and make the body an automaton, while work of great variety which requires initiative and swift decision, tends to cultivate the corresponding faculties and make the worker more alert and self-dependent. There is a type of the executive person as there is of the salesman, of the clerk and of the scribe, and the traits of all these types are developed in the individual by the influence of this occupation.

But the things you turn to for recreation and by preference, the company you seek, the books you read,

the amusements you love, these things have a yet more powerful influence, in their way, in molding the personal traits by which you are distinguished from the general run of your associates. Because the choice of these things is quite voluntary and spontaneous, and because we yield ourselves to them by preference, they have all the more influence in coloring insensibly, by their welcome reactions, our intimate character and thoughts. From them our tastes can be justly estimated. Those tastes in turn are influenced and deepened by them. Habits grow in us from repeated exercise of the same or similar actions. Each time we choose a loftier or a less excellent object, as the case may be, for friendship, entertainment, reading and so on with the rest, we deepen our preference for that manner of object, and confirm our taste, for better or worse, according as the object is worthy or the opposite.

A brief introspection will show us of the truth of these observations. Do you wish to estimate your own level of taste and feeling? Begin by considering frankly what is your customary choice in friends, amusements, books. Is it refinement and elevation of character, goodness and gentleness, intrinsic merit and honest worth, that attract you in the one or the other of your friends? Do you choose of set purpose what is genuine, noble and sincere? If so, then you may be sure that you have refined and right

tastes in these important matters, and as you go on thus wisely choosing, you will find your tastes growing yet more correct and good. In proportion as you are sincere in desiring and firm in choosing only what is genuine, and in refusing to be dazzled by seeming merit or carried away by flashy pretense, in just that proportion your taste will grow more solid and refined, your appreciation more trustworthy and secure.

If, on the other hand, you discover by sincere self-inspection that your tastes are rather for pinchbeck and tinsel than for genuine metal, that you take up with friends more because they flatter your foibles and agree with your weaknesses than because of their own merit and worthiness, if you prefer the current and the vulgar in reading and amusements instead of the more elevated and refined, if you run with the crowd in your tastes and gulp down whatever the favor of the mob applauds just at the moment, then you have reason to suspect that your taste is not quite all it should be and to make some definite effort to better your personal preferences. Indeed, it is unfortunately true that if you discover your tastes to be quite ordinary and usual and not at all different from those of the common run, then you have reason to be dissatisfied with your own standards. One must nowadays, unhappily, beware of the

ordinary standards of taste. One must be a little unusual if one is to keep on the side of good taste and refinement.

This has always been true indeed, that good taste leans away from the crowd. The very word "vulgar," which we use as the commonest synonym for what is coarse and unrefined, is from the Latin word which means a crowd. The shrewd old Romans took it for granted that the number of the refined and cultured would always remain a minority, and that the general mob would be lacking in special taste and refinement. The days of democracy may, by degrees, change all that. But, so far, even universal education (which does not, alas! include effective culture and refinement) has been unable to elevate the taste of the majority. For proof one need only look at the popular amusements and current reading. For one entertainment, or one book, that is refined and elevating, one finds a dozen that are cheap, coarse and crude. The purveyors of popular amusement and popular reading, shrewd commercialists as they are, have gauged the general fancy with a sharp eye to dollars and cents. The result of their expert conclusions is expressed most eloquently in the stuff they serve in theaters, in moving-picture palaces, in the periodicals whose glaring covers flaunt on the book-stalls. Need any-

one go to the trouble of proving that the public taste today is not particularly high, when one sees the bill-boards and the book-stalls?

We may perhaps flatter ourselves that we are beyond and above the influence of this prevalent vulgarity of public tastes. True, we read and notice these things and are amused by them. But it is mere amusement that we feel and nothing more. We have no taste for these trivialities, but simply glance at them to keep up with the times. It is not to them that we would turn by preference. This is all very well to say, but it is a simple fact, whether we realize it or not, that the things we read and the amusements in which we find our recreation color the mind and determine the inclination of our thoughts. By being habitually amused and entertained with what is cheap, vulgar and trivial, we insensibly degrade our taste and accustom our intelligence and fancy to feed upon this insipient and unwholesome diet. Just as the reading of excellent literature insensibly trains the taste and elevates the fancy, so the devouring of cheap and tawdry stuff degrades and dulls the finer sensibilities and lowers the standard of our tastes.

It is very expedient, therefore, that we take some care in this matter of our tastes. It will not do at all merely to follow our fancy and take up at haphazard whatever blows our way. With a pernicious

activity and astonishing perseverance the purveyors of cheap and trivial reading cast it at every door and force it into every hand. It is mere commercialism that determines the circulation of the greater part of modern "literature." If we allow ourselves to be wheedled into reading everything that comes our way, we shall cultivate a very common and vulgar taste indeed.

There is a cheap timeliness about modern print, which attracts the unwary. But in a year, that shallow varnish of popularity has worn away. Where are the books of yesteryear? It may have been true in some favored times of the world, that popular fancy was a guide to good taste and that the many chose their amusements and their art discreetly. Yet that time is surely passed away. One must go against the current and run counter to the popular favor in many things if one would reach a standard of good taste in reading and amusements.

It was a cynic who said, "Be virtuous and you will be eccentric." Like most cynical sayings, this one is not even true in the realm of morals. But it is true in the realm of good taste. To be excellent, one must be a bit out of the ordinary. It is by one's individualities of taste, that one shows one's personal training in such matters. To have good taste merely as others have and to take the color of the general atmosphere about one, is no great evidence of cul-

ture. But to have the power of choice and discrimination, to be able to select and enjoy what is best from among the miscellaneous stuff which is served up to us, this shows a personal discrimination and does us some credit.

As we are wise, then, we shall cultivate this individual discrimination, this habit of seeking out what is excellent and exquisite according to our lights. We need not fear to be a bit unusual and to go apart a little from the beaten path. Our individuality is precious to us, and it must be maintained by keeping up the habit of personal choice. Neither need we fear to lose enjoyment by cultivating our tastes. We shall gain much more true pleasure and satisfaction by learning to like what appeals to the best in our nature, than by satisfying ourselves with what is less elevated and genuine. Our faculties are limited. We can only achieve a certain definite measure of reading, reflection, speech, enjoyment. Why not give ourselves the benefit of the best there is, and train ourselves to take the sweetest honey from the choicest flowers, rather than hover indiscriminately above blossoms and above weeds?

This final reflection should move us, that the love and pursuit of what is most excellent in matters of taste and judgment, is most conformable to the better

part of our human nature and therefore tends to ennoble and refine us and make us more apt for spiritual things. A wise author has said that the artistic and refined temperament is most suited for sanctity. Certainly sanctity ennobles and refines, and many of the saints, like St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales, have been illustrious for good taste as well as for holiness. Reason enough, then, to examine how we stand in the matter of a careful discrimination, and to endeavor by deliberate choice and studied self-discipline to elevate our tastes and increase our appreciation of what is genuinely good.

By doing all this for the glory of God and with the intention of mounting a little nearer, by the aid of His creatures, to that Uncreated Beauty whose delights ravish the blessed, we shall still further refine and sanctify this self of ours so capable of the sublimest flights of goodness, as it is, alas! able also to descend into such dark abysses. It is ours to choose whether we shall give rein to our nobler self which craves for what is beautiful and pure, or to the baser, whose appetites incline to things of the earth earthy, to the allurements of the flesh. In cultivating our tastes by the deliberate choice of what is refined, worthy, noble and excellent, we are forever bringing out the angel in us and subduing our lower and

coarser selves. Thence the importance of cultivating our tastes and of using rightly those moments of leisure and recreation when we can freely select our friendships, pleasures and avocations.

OUR DEAREST ENEMIES

WE APPRECIATE our friends. They are exceedingly dear to us. When we count over, as we should often do, the gifts and blessings of God, so as to return thanks for them, it is of our dear and loving friends that we think among the first of our blessings. They are our best possession in this world, because their affectionate and patient goodness will supply us for the loss or need of almost every earthly blessing. If we are poor, their means are ready for us; if we are ill, they will nurse us; when in affliction, we shall be consoled by our friends, and we can lean on them in our weakness. We have also one of the most exquisite joys in life from returning their friendship, sharing their joys and doing for them in distress what they would so readily do for us in time of need or sorrow. It is extremely easy, therefore, to thank God for our friends.

But have we ever thanked Him enough for our dear enemies? Do we appreciate quite enough what a true blessing of God it is to have with us also some

who dislike, afflict and perhaps even hate us. Here is a consideration worth a little pondering! "This is, of course, a mere paradox," someone will say, perhaps. "Enemies are not dear or precious at all. Of course Our Lord did command us to love our enemies, but by that He meant to tell us to forgive them and to wish them well. But to say that it is really an advantage to us to have people who dislike us and disapprove of us, who are opposed to us and even hate us, is a bit too much. It is hard enough to forgive one's enemies and to wish them well. But to thank God for them, and be glad one has them, is more than I can swallow."

Well, let us see. To begin with, who are our enemies? Those who dislike, oppose and cross us. Most of us have happily no dark and melodramatic enemies like the villains of popular thrillers and of the movies, who plot and scheme to destroy us. Those whom the ordinary man or woman counts as enemies are the ones who oppose, dislike and cross them. The critical, observant people with sharp eyes and sometimes sharper tongues, those who, far from flattering us, or making us feel that we are better than we are, point out, in a most uncomfortable way, faults and failings, and inform us of a number of things which we had rather not admit even to ourselves. "And do you say," our imaginary interlocutor will remark again, "that these people are

really dear and to be given thanks for their unkindness? Is it conceivable that anyone should seriously say that it is a blessing to have enemies? That is not common sense and, therefore, it cannot be perfection. Put up with these people, of course; render them good for evil; but as to counting them dear and being grateful to them, we beg to be excused."

Yet it is the literal truth, that these people, critical and unpleasant, may really be more precious and salutary to us than our dearest friends. For our opponents show us ourselves as we are.

"Oh wad some pow'r the giftie gie' us
To see oursel's as ithers see us!"

sang Burns in a memorable couplet. In the eyes of our friends, we seldom see ourselves as we are. Their kindness disguises our shortcomings, and their forbearance glosses over our misdoings. For candid sharpness and directness of vision, commend me to the critical and the opposed. Their remarks, sometimes jerked out in an unpleasant fit of temper, cut like a knife, but they also cut to the line. Sometimes you may have profited more in the matter of self-knowledge by one impatient remark, spoken off-guard by someone who was angry and tingling with unpleasant candor and truth, than you would have gained from worlds of sugared and honeyed com-

ments received from your loving friends. Our enemies, therefore, or at least those who oppose us, are precious because they tell us precisely what they think. Again, they help us to correct what is amiss.

There was once a man high up in political life who had struggled for twenty years with an evident failing. His friends had remonstrated with him, painstakingly and kindly. He had also delivered to himself a number of most earnest and heartfelt admonitions and made corresponding resolutions, which were broken with as persistent frequency. One day, in the midst of a severe political dispute, his antagonist became heated to the point of perfect candor, and, before a large audience, descending into personalities, excoriated the failing of his opponent, which happened to be bad temper, with such a marvelous ridicule that the crowd roared with laughter, recognizing the truth of the accusation. The politician left the stage, fuming with rage at what he thought was an unjustifiable personal attack. But that one public excoriation did more for him than all the previous admonitions. From that day he was ashamed to lose his temper because the smiles of those about him recalled too bitterly to his mind the bitter sarcasm of that fiery-tongued politician.

But this is not all the good our enemies do. They give us exceedingly precious occasions of merit. Our

Lord pointed out, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, that when we love those who love us, we do nothing very extraordinary, since even the heathens do this. But He bade us to love those who hate us, and to be kind to those who despise us, because in doing this we show that we are children of our Father who is in heaven. The saints delighted in returning good for evil, and some of the most heroic and glorious episodes in the history of mankind have been occasioned by the bitter attacks of malignant enemies. We shall never have an opportunity of suffering so much as did the saints, but in our small way we can exercise their divine and Christ-like charity. It is those who resist, oppose and dislike us, who will give us the best opportunities to practice gentleness and forbearance.

Finally, if we are of the right material and serious in our wish to be good, it is our dearest enemies who will bring out the noblest qualities in us. Generally speaking, most good people are best in times of affliction. For one who can be thoroughly good, devoted and pious with complete prosperity, there are a hundred who blossom out into unsuspected virtue when some misfortune or affliction tries them. Most of us are like those sweet-scented plants which only give forth their aromatic fragrance when they are trampled on. When all goes well with us, we are inclined to become self-sufficient, proud and

selfish. It requires rubs and tramplings to make us humble, gentle and kind. It is our dearest enemies who do the trampling for us. They are the ones who generously supply that due amount of bruising which makes the fragrance of our charity ascend to the angels. If we had no one to vex and try us we should lack many chances of great merit.

All this may seem theoretical and visionary. We have only to look to the world as it is, to see its entire and literal truth. All the lives of the saints are histories of trials well borne, and these trials in most instances came from their dearest enemies. A great part of their biographies is taken up with the account of what others did to them, and sometimes the trials which they had to bear were altogether amazing. Their saintliness is brought out by the way they acted toward those who persecuted and offended them. Thus, one is startled to read in the life of such an ecstatic as St. John of the Cross, for instance, how certain of his brethren shut him up in a dungeon and persecuted him unmercifully. So, too, St. John Francis Regis, St. Peter Claver, even St. Francis de Sales and St. Teresa, had to endure agonizing afflictions from others, and we can see very clearly in the retrospect how precious to them were their dearest enemies.

No doubt, the providence of God gave them those who would misunderstand, afflict and vex them, pre-

cisely because they needed this to bring them to the perfection of divine charity for God and for their neighbor. And the singular thing about these enemies of theirs is that they were so often good and well-meaning people. St. Ignatius is, of course, a shining example of this persecution from the good. When he began his wonderful career of public ministrations he was forthwith set upon by well-meaning, zealous people, was accused of heresy, tried by the Inquisition, threatened with the rack, with tortures and the dungeon, and compelled again and again to go through painful legal trials to vindicate his fair name. So, too, the Society of which he is the founder, in common with other religious organizations, has had to suffer from the mistaken zeal of the good as well as from the malice of the evil, and it is a matter of ordinary experience how much perfectly good and well-meaning persons will vex and try one another.

All this springs from our imperfections, but it is not without its providential purpose. It really requires more supernatural charity and forbearance to endure the well-meant afflictions of the good, than to suffer the persecutions of the wicked. Let us, therefore, when we suffer afflictions from those who are set against us, look for the hand of Providence and kiss God's loving fingers that chastise us. Let us remember to thank God no less for our opponents

than for our friends, and let us see through the benignant designs of God, who lets others vex and afflict us so that we may receive from these trials the good which He intends.

We shall not want for this benediction. The defects of human nature and the ordinary and common faults in us and in those about us will supply us abundantly with precious contradictions. The main thing is, while these trials are upon us, and after they are gone, not to miss any of the self-knowledge, the opportunities of merit, the cultivation of our nobler and more generous selves, and the likeness to our persecuted Saviour which we can gain from the visitations of our dearest enemies!

CONFIDENCE

THE desire to succeed in life, like the desire to be happy, is common to us all. Go anywhere, in civilized and savage lands, among Christians or pagans, and you will find everyone everywhere trying to succeed. Ideals of success, and aims and methods of trying, vary indefinitely of course. But to succeed in life according to his own notions of success, is the purpose of every mortal.

It is extraordinarily important, though, to have a right notion of what true success signifies and of what are the sure means to achieve it. The one is as necessary as the other. Supposing, as we shall for the present, that you have the truest ideals and the soundest principles concerning genuine success in life, that you look at all things in the light of reason and faith and are intent on using your life to the best advantage for the service of God and your neighbor and the good of your soul; it still remains for you to consider whether you have the right means in hand and are taking the right attitude and method of action to carry out the good you purpose.

Passing by for the present the other elements of success, the other requisites for employing our gifts and talents and time to the best advantage, let us dwell a bit on one requirement which somehow is often overlooked by those who are earnestly bent on succeeding in the truest sense and anxious to improve whatever opportunities God has given them. For want of this requisite, too, many promising careers have failed to reach their crown of achievement. Too many hopeful beginnings have had sad endings because of a lack of this necessary quality. The requirement we speak of, is a spirit of proper and reasonable confidence.

If characters could be analyzed as material compounds are, and the elements of which they are composed could be described by weight and measure, their deficiencies determined and their excesses pointed out precisely, then doubtless the result would be surprising, and to none more than to the possessors. Men would perceive then that mishaps and failures which they had blamed on circumstances or accidents of fortune or the actions of others, really come from wants and defects in their own character. They would see how much success depends upon the cultivation of their personal qualities, and would be able, by filling in what is deficient and cutting off what is excessive in their own make-up, to conquer

circumstances and command success where now they are headed for failure.

And, perhaps, if such scientific analysis of character were made, the quality requisite for success which would oftenest be found lacking in good and well-meaning folk, would be this one of confidence. The want of confidence, the lack of courage which follows on that want, have wrecked more promising careers than we commonly realize.

It is an ordinary observation that if a man is firmly persuaded that he can do a thing, can achieve a difficult adventure, overcome a stubborn difficulty, gain an arduous end, then he is likely to succeed in doing it. Confidence stimulates his powers, gives strength to his arms, and sureness to his feet. The heart beats high with courage when a man feels assured of success, and he will bear fatigues and pain, put forth terrific efforts, persevere through agonizing discouragements, if only he is full of an indomitable spirit of confidence.

On the contrary, it is quite certain that if a man has no confidence in himself and in his success, he is unfit for enterprise and doomed to failure. To expect mishap is to court an accident. Once let a man lose his nerve on a difficult path, and he will slip and go headlong. Where confidence walks with light step and leaps over obstacles, discouragement shuffles along stumbling, and falls at trifles.

Apply this to your own life, and it will throw perhaps some needed light upon your past failures and your future prospects. You have certainly desired and labored for success. Your motives were good, your aspirations worthy. To make the most of opportunity, to serve God and your neighbor well with what gifts you have, this has been the purpose of your efforts. Why, then, has a more generous measure of success not come to you? What lack in your own character has held you back? May it not have been a want of proper and necessary confidence? Hardly aware, perhaps, of your own lack of becoming assurance, you may have still hesitated to believe that you could accomplish the great and generous things you desired, and so were afraid to try. Without trying, without a courageous beginning, no worthy end can be reached. To take the first step, energetic and unafraid, demands a steady confidence.

We remember an amusing tale by one of the French masters of comedy, which illustrates this truth in whimsical wise. His hero is a Gascon, full of energy and restlessness, but no great marvel of courage. A friend invites him to an excursion in the Alps. The good man is afraid to risk his life or limbs in scaling peaks and crossing glaciers where one slip might mean a fall of a thousand metres. But his friend assures him in all confidence that the dangers of the Alps have been reduced by the system

of an Alpine Company to mere appearances of peril. Every step is guarded and every motion supervised, he says, so that the would-be adventurer, shielded even against his will, keeps only the appearance of risk, and steps out securely over the once-perilous places, ensured against mishap.

The hero believes this officious lie and takes therefrom the sublimest confidence. He rushes into danger and out of it with a calm assurance that nothing evil can befall him, which makes his step firm and his head steady in every peril. Armed with this confidence born of delusion, he performs prodigies of agility and courage, and conquers the perils of the Alps, most real and terrible, but which his new-got assurance had robbed of all their horrors. For all the extravagance of the tale, it carries a kernel of sound truth. Many a man who is hesitating, stumbling, and falling on his way, could run and climb with steady foot if only he were shod with confidence.

Granted, then, that confidence is so essential a disposition to success, how may we go about acquiring so desirable a quality? We must distinguish between different sorts of confidence. One kind of assurance is based on a man's own personality and natural powers. Conscious of his own strong will and innate capacity and talent, such a one may be filled with the conviction that he is born to succeed,

and may rush with confidence along the beginnings of his way, sure of himself and master, to a certain degree, of circumstances, when others, unaware of his conscious powers, look on and laugh or wonder. Thus Napoleon was filled with confidence even in his callow youth, long before he became the leader of armies. Thus was Dante so persuaded of his destined immortality as a poet, that, in the first canto of his *Inferno*, he imagines the supreme poets of all time making a place for him in their shadowy company. Thus Horace felt when he sang, "I have built a monument more lasting than brass!" But this manner of confidence is beyond the reach of common men, nor is it the most precious in itself. The loftiest achievements are born of assurance of another kind.

The noblest confidence is that which springs from faith and reason, and this is the confidence of the saints, which we all must share in our own measure and foster in ourselves as they did, by thoughts and prayer. No human achievements can match the exploits of the saints, and no merely earthly confidence can bear comparison with theirs. They were men and women much like ourselves in their weaknesses and passions, their difficulties, deficiencies and trials. They were called to exploits which far exceeded the achievements of great conquerors like Napoleon or great poets like Dante and Horace. Their battles

were not with mustering armies of men, but with their own selves and with the unseen powers of evil. They were, besides, conscious of their own weakness and incapacity for good, to a degree proportionate to their clear inward vision and profound self-knowledge. Yet their sublime and unfaltering confidence is among the most extraordinary and universal of their characteristics.

St. Francis of Assisi was one of the humblest of men, and so great was his sense of his own lowliness and weakness, that he could never be persuaded to assume the dignity of the priesthood, and would not advance beyond the holy grade of deacon. Distrust of himself and fear of his own weakness were habitual with him. Yet to this lowliness was joined so sublime and unconquerable a confidence, that he did not hesitate to found two great Orders and to send his followers, destitute, for the love of Christ, of all earthly succor, to the farthest parts of the earth to conquer the world for God. He himself set forth with heroic intrepidity to convert a king sunk in the errors of Mohammedanism, and his fearless courage won the favor of the astonished monarch and saved the life of the saintly preacher, where a less perfect confidence would have met with fury and murderous resentment.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, stricken by that happy cannon-ball which deprived Spain perhaps of an

obscure captain, but gave a glorious general to the hosts of God, read on his sick bed the stories of God's heroes, and conceived therefrom a sublime and, to us, surprising confidence of doing, himself, such like things for God. "Dominic has done these wonders," he said to himself; "Francis and Benedict have become saints—so will Ignatius likewise." Armed with this assurance he plunged headlong into a life of prayer and mortification such as took heaven itself by storm. With burning will he hurried along the ways of perfection, making the more speed because he had begun so late. Nothing discouraged his steady ardor. As God disclosed little by little what things He wished Ignatius to do, Ignatius went forth with confidence to achieve them. He would learn Latin, he would form a spiritual army, he would send his men to Europe, or to the Indies. He had confidence for anything, and his calm assurance was so grounded in God's will, that he made the astonishing remark that were his Society itself suppressed, it would take him but a quarter of an hour before the Blessed Sacrament to recover his repose of spirit.

If we wish to learn the secret of irresistible confidence, we shall do well to study the methods of the saints. St. Teresa, that valiant woman, whose courage bore her like a warrior through conflicts within and without her, that a strong man might tremble to endure, through illness and suffering,

through slander and opposition, through the misunderstandings of friends and the attacks of enemies, once betrayed the secret of her sublime assurance in a simple saying. "God and Teresa," she said, "can do whatever God Himself can do." Her confidence was indomitable because it was grounded upon Omnipotence itself!

We shall be wise deliberately to imitate the method of the saints, and to establish our personal confidence, so necessary for our success in life, on the same solid and enduring basis which supported theirs. We may say and think with absolute assurance, what the great apostle of the Gentiles says in his sublime and heroic confidence in God. "I can do all things," he cries, "in Him who strengtheneth me!" Every soul of us may reëcho that mighty cry of courage. It is literally true of us all as it was of St. Paul himself, that we can do all things which God desires us to accomplish, in Him who has infinite wisdom and power to aid us in whatever He gives us to perform.

Analyze the diffidence which so far has interfered with your success, and you will find that it springs chiefly from a consideration of your own weakness and incapacity. When generous resolutions and heroic plans come to your thoughts, you are perhaps inclined to turn your eyes within you and to see how very weak and worthless you truly are of your own

self. The sight does not make for confidence. In spiritual exploits and endeavors, we are the more likely to be discouraged if we look at our own poor faculties, scarred and weakened by Adam's sin and by our own. No wonder we lack confidence if we depend upon ourselves.

But take into your consideration the power and goodness of God, and then the shadow of your own littleness and imperfections will be lost in the brightness of His infinite ability and willingness to aid you. God and you together can accomplish whatever God can do, and the circumstance that you bring for your share only incapacity and meanness, makes little difference when you have the aid of infinite greatness and strength. Those who climb dizzy cliffs always fix their eyes on high and look toward the great summit which calls them onward. If they drop their gaze to the depths below, they grow confused and fall.

At all costs, then, whatever effort may be needed, let us all take heart of grace and cultivate the generous confidence of the saints, looking to God, and not to our own littleness. When discouragement and faint-heartedness assail us, as they often will, just when we are planning to do great things in God's service, let us remember the wisdom of the saints, and say in our hearts with faith and under-

standing: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." "God and I can accomplish whatever God Himself can do."

OUR UNBOUNDED POWER

NOT the least strange among the paradoxes of our human nature is our strength-in-weakness, the marvelous union in us of pitiful feebleness and astounding powers. Our physical nature is weakness itself when compared to the vast strength of natural forces. "Today we are but a little mucus," says Marcus Aurelius, "tomorrow, dust and ashes." Yet, how extraordinary is the strength we can develop by aid of our intelligence, which gives us command over the powers of the wind and the seas, puts electricity at our bidding, and nerves our weak hand with all the power of steam.

Our own limbs will scarcely bear us forward for long at a faster rate than some pitiful three miles an hour. But carried on the elemental powers which we have harnessed for our use, we can rival the swiftness of the winds and outrun the fleetest of our fellow creatures. Even the conquest of the air has been given to this generation, and where man used to watch and envy the swiftness of the eagle and the

sea-gull, he can rise now among the flocks of heaven and outdo them all in airy flights.

We rejoice in these sublime achievements, and exalt in the consciousness of human powers. But there is a far greater mightiness in us, a constant and unbounded force waiting at our hand, which we neither realize nor treasure. We have a power so God-like and sublime, that it makes us like to angels in dominion, co-rulers with God Himself in His universe, and able to direct the course of human destinies and heal and help and save great numbers of mankind.

The nature of this power is indeed such that it makes us sharers in some sort in the omnipotence of God. By its exercise, which is at every moment within our reach, we associate ourselves with God and make Him, if we may dare to use the phrase, our partner and co-worker. It is His divine mercy that has allowed us to employ such terms in speaking of this power of ours, for He has given us assurance that there is no limit to the use we may make of His omnipotence, provided we act according to the rules of His divine providence.

So sublime, indeed, and so unbounded, is this power of which we speak, that St. Teresa, who had experienced deeply its efficacy and amplitude, dared, as we have recalled in another chapter, to express her intimate knowledge by a wonderful saying.

Filled with amazement at God's goodness in bestowing so immense a faculty upon us, and remembering the examples of its efficacy, she cried out one day in an ecstasy of gratitude and appreciation: "God and Teresa can do whatever God Himself can do!"

Having said so much about this marvelous power of ours, it is perhaps superfluous to give it a name. There is but one means by which we, feeble, impotent, wretched in ourselves can so change the universe and sway the coarsing of the ages. How can we enter into the souls of other men, inundate them with God's graces, "bend the stubborn heart and will, melt the frozen, warm the chill, guide the steps that go astray"? By what effort of our own can we change even the course of human events, bring to pass things that we desire for our soul's good and for the souls of others, avert misfortunes, gain temporal goods and blessings, scatter benedictions over the entire earth?

How may we, never leaving our own threshold, laboring in the quiet of a hidden chapel or in the seclusion of our small room at home, go forth with power and efficacy to the uttermost ends of the earth, bring the Gospel to nations that sit in darkness and in the valley of death, convert sinners, help the dying? Nay, how may we even penetrate beyond the grave and knock mightily upon the gates of purgatory until the great angels who are guardians

there, relent and open wide the gloomy gates and release to the glory of heaven myriads of souls who but for our great power would have sojourned there throughout many weary weeks of years?

The incarnate God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth, whose nature it is neither to deceive nor to be deceived, has spoken of this power of ours in terms which are so ample, that did we not know who He is that speaks, we should be tempted to think them tinged with exaggeration: "Ask, and it shall be given you," He says; "seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you." What a wide and general promise! What iteration and reiteration of assurance! But even this saying is not forcible enough for the Eternal Truth: "For whoever asketh, receiveth," He says again, and "he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." There are no qualifications to this promise save those which reason itself and the perfection of God impose. Providing we ask, seek, knock as we should and for things that we should desire, God puts no limits to His generosity. This is the charter and the warrant for our power.

But the Divine Goodness was not content even with this sublime declaration, "If you ask the Father anything in My name," He cried out, "He will give it you." He complained that His apostles did not use as He desires, the abundance of the

power He gives to us. "Hitherto," He says, "you have not asked anything in My name. Ask, and you shall receive; that your joy may be full." The whole life of Christ is a constant lesson of the power of prayer. For thirty years it was His own chief exercise. For every day that He spent in active labors of preaching and teaching, He had spent ten days in the hidden life of labor and prayer, of prayer which was most efficacious labor, and labor which was most availing prayer.

In the midst of His wearyless journeys and preaching, when the multitude thronged around Him and one would have thought that His every moment would have been devoted to teaching and to healing the bodies and souls of men, He still took time for long hours of prayer. He began His public life with forty days of prayer in the desert. The solitude of Olivet saw His prostrate form, silvered by the moon, bent motionless in prayer. He went to the desert to pray. He, the Omnipotent God, who could do all things by a single act of His all-powerful will, yet chose in His human nature to give us the example of prayer, and would not depart from that law of our being, that the greatest exercise of our faculties, the most sublime and unbounded power given our human nature, is the power of prayer.

The example of Our Saviour justifies that maxim of the saints, that all things should be begun, car-

ried on and brought to an end with prayer. His life, from its first instant on earth was such a paeon of prayer, that our dull intelligences cannot faintly conceive the intensities and ardors of that intercession from the instant when, assuming human nature, He said in the words of the Scriptures, "In the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will, O God," to the moment when bowing His head on the cross, He cried out, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

His public life, which began with the forty days' prayer in the desert, ended with the prayer of His agony. He prayed for Jerusalem with tears, for His disciples at the Last Supper with joy and anticipation. Prayer was the breath of His life, the joy of His heart, the power of His soul, the life of His life. He gives us an example of prayer in gladness and in sorrow, in peace and in trial, in the quiet of humble labor and in the press of strenuous affairs. "Pray always!" cries out Our Lord in His holy Gospel. He but puts into words what His example had preached most eloquently through the sublime course of His mortal life.

All the saints without exception have loved and employed this unbounded power of prayer. Some indeed made prayer the business of their days, like those old hermits and solitaries who, driven forth into the deserts by the persecutions of Roman em-

perors, Decius and his like, found solitude so sweet and prayer so healthful for their spirit, that they never returned to the haunts of men, but made the solitude echo with their holy prayers and canticles. From that day to ours, religious life in monasteries and convents, has been in great measure dedicated to prayer. Even those Religious who spend much of their time in active labor, intersperse their toils with moments of prayer. Their ideal, like that of their Model and Master, is to pray by labor and to labor in prayer for the salvation of mankind.

The efforts of the saints are extraordinary, their preaching, writing, journeying, teaching, their multiplied and incessant toils for the glory of God and the good of souls, exceed what one would think possible to human nature. Yet, perhaps, nay, we may say surely, the greatest of their achievements, the most fruitful of their labors, was their incessant prayer. The presence of God was with their thoughts continually. In the midst of every trial and toil they spoke to Him, pleaded with Him borrowed, by their patient and confiding supplications, the aid of His omnipotence.

What their example teaches us, their eloquent words persuade us also—to make good use to the limit of our ability of that unbounded power which God has given us in promising to heed and answer

our prayers. St. Alphonsus Liguori wrote an entire volume on prayer, and in its Preface he pleads with all who read, to spread the book abroad and make it known to all men not for the sake of him who wrote it, but so that all may learn and realize the priceless treasure they have in prayer. "Pray each day," he says, "for the needs of the day. If you ask today, God will help you today, but for tomorrow you must ask tomorrow. Pray to persevere, and pray also that you may continue praying to persevere." With insistent ardor, with unwearying repetition, the Saint exhorts us to employ this measureless faculty we have of borrowing God's omnipotence by prayer.

The powers of man over the physical world manifest themselves visibly and appeal to our senses. We can see the great masses of machinery which hurl themselves into action at the touch of a slight lever or the pressing of a delicate control. We see the hills melt away under the strokes of laboring shovels, vast buildings rise from earth, great harbors reach their moles into the sea. We mark the mighty ships cleaving the stormy ocean, the lightsome vessels of the air droning down the sky. We look upon the marvels of electricity and steam, the working of delicate machinery which spins and weaves and prints and stamps and carries on a thousand intricate

processes with almost human sensitiveness and precision. These are the visible results of the powers of man over the material universe.

But our unbounded power of prayer does not show itself in such swift and tangible manifestations. It needs the eye of faith to perceive that through the whole warp and woof of human experience run like golden threads the consequences of prayer. The sum of human history bears witness to that unbounded power. The life of the individual Christian manifests its efficacy. Yet, we see now only very dimly the results of prayer. We realize only by faith how constant and immense is its influence.

The more merit ours, and the wiser we, if we are solicitous without wearying to exercise to the utmost this sublime power. The fatigue we feel, the dulness, the doubts which haunt us concerning the efficacy of our prayer, are only so many reasons for persevering more indomitably and for exercising more industriously this heavenly power of ours.

God tries us in many ways when we pray. At times dryness and distractions consume the soul. The heavens seem to be of brass and to offer an impassible resistance to our petitions. The things we plead for seem indefinitely delayed in their accomplishment. Our efforts become almost intolerably hard. Precisely then is the time to persevere in prayer. We cannot exercise too great an industry

to become proficient in prayer. No diligence is too extreme to learn the holy art of turning all our lives and all our works to prayer. Our own good, the welfare of those dear to us, the very destinies of the Church and the world are in our hand to help and further if we will, and the means of exercising this unbounded power is—humble, confident, persevering prayer.

COMPASSION

SOMETIMES—and surely it is a special grace of God and the finger of the Most High touching and moving our hearts—we feel a rush of deep compassion for the sorrows and the miseries of our fellowmen. It may be the sight of some one who is especially afflicted, that moves us to this gentle sympathy and takes our thoughts from our own concerns to make them dwell pityingly and with love upon the sorrows of others. It may be the mere recollection of what we know or can guess of the vast sum of human afflictions, of the great and grievous suffering which men's sins and follies have drawn down upon them, that stirs us to commiseration.

So our heart melts in pity. Our own afflictions dwindle away by comparison with all the trials that others are compelled to suffer. We feel our souls uplifted and purified from some of the dross of selfishness by the immense sympathy we feel for the necessities and distresses of our fellowmen. Our inward vision, too much bent upon our own con-

cerns and troubles, is now lifted to look out upon the world of men. The great multitudes who fill the earth with their sighs and groanings, become suddenly more real to us and move us to compassion. We breathe a prayer to God for the help and consolation of all who are in affliction, and with Christ-like charity we love and pity all mankind, friends and enemies, known and unknown.

We may well give our hearts over to this noble, purifying impulse of compassion. We shall be wise deliberately to cultivate the habit of feeling for the afflictions of others and of embracing with our sympathy the entire world of sorrow. To have a tender heart, to feel Christian compassion for the sufferings of others, is a virtue that like the quality of mercy (to which indeed it is most closely akin) blesses him that gives and him that takes.

We are too much, all of us, the center of our own horizon. Stand where we will, when we look with our bodily eyes abroad over the world, each one of us sees himself to be the center of a vast circle bounded only by the limit of vision and where every line converges to his all-important self. It is only an optical illusion, to be sure, and the circle of our individual horizon exists nowhere in fact. Yet, wherever we go, our gaze refers all things to our own small center, and we judge of sizes and dis-

tances, of importance and of measure, by referring all things to ourselves.

It has been remarked that this trick of our eyes has a counterpart in the tendency of our inward vision to judge everything likewise by its relations to and distance from our own precious persons. Instinctively we refer everything to the center of our own interest and concern, estimating events and things in so far as they have reference to ourselves. Within certain limits this tendency of ours is of course natural and right. Our first duty is to attend to our own affairs, and well-ordered charity, according to the much-abused but very worthy maxim, begins at home. The constant danger is, however, not that we shall neglect our own interests as we conceive them, but that the too great concentration of our concern on our own selves will actually defeat the end of our strivings. To think too much of self, to plan too exclusively for self, is to neglect our most important and necessary service to others and thus to do self a mortal injury.

Whatever, therefore, tends reasonably to counteract this inordinate impulse toward the center of ourselves, is of great benefit to our life and character. A heart which is forever bent back upon its own desires, needs, sufferings, becomes morbid and rank with self-pity just as a thicket tangled and twisted upon itself breeds unhealthy fungi under its dark

and poisonous shade. Self-pity, a diseased sensitiveness to one's own sufferings, is a malady of these introspective times. Much of the feverish craving for novelty and excitement which we see manifested everywhere about us nowadays, may be due to a desperate reaction against the tendency men feel within them to analyze their own sorrows and dwell upon their own small personal concerns.

Compassion, a thought and feeling for the sorrows of others, an abiding interest for other men's concerns, is a far surer, nobler antidote for false self-pity than is wild distraction or feverish amusement. Compassion does not, like these other remedies, act like an opiate and deaden feeling without removing the source of the evil. Rather, like a true cure, it sweeps away the evil humors and heals the festering wound. To pity others, to feel for their griefs, is pure balm for our personal anguish. We cannot pity ourselves very much nor grow very discouraged over our own small share of suffering if we have grace to realize and compassionate the huge sum of human sorrow.

And what motives we have for this Christ-like pity of mankind! What claims the sad children of Adam have upon our continual compassion! Merely a glance over the world, little as we know of it, reveals unending occasions for pitying and suffering with (for this is the meaning of compassion) the

sorrows of men. In the circle of your own acquaintance, among the comparatively few whom you personally know, there are many who have to suffer, and various are the afflictions which either their own folly or that of others or the common lot of man has brought upon them! Their bodily pain, their mental misery, the losses of money or of goods, the deaths of those dear to them, the physical or mental afflictions which they have to endure, these, if we realize them, must move us to compassion. Compared to the sum of affliction even of all those whom we know, our own personal griefs dwindle into insignificance.

But look wider afield, and consider the sufferings and trials of those who live in the same city as yourself. What are your individual vexations and afflictions as compared with theirs? Put your share of misfortune into that great total of afflictions, and it will be lost completely in comparison. There are those, it may be, among your fellow citizens who would gladly change places with you and would consider that, in taking your lot as it is, they were passing from suffering to peace. At all events, compared to the mass of common afflictions, you have only a very little part of suffering.

Extend your vision once again, and embrace the whole nation in which you live, with its hundred millions of mortals each one bearing some load of

want, sorrow, affliction, unsatisfied desire, anxiety, illness, physical pain or spiritual anguish. The men and women you meet upon the streets are carrying each one a burden unseen but no less real and sensible to them. So, too, are the thronging millions whom you do not see, but who are going each his way under a weight of trial. God's providence, which tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, allows each one some salutary suffering; nor can we quarrel with God's mercy, which dispenses or permits affliction for His own glory and the good of souls. Matched with the sorrows of a nation, one's own particular burden becomes so light as to be inconsiderable by comparison. Yet what is the sorrow even of a nation, compared to the total of the whole world's misery?

The imagination reels and faints when we put it to the task of conceiving the multitudes of humankind. The statisticians who have cast up the number of living mortals place it at about fourteen hundred millions of men, women, and children in the whole world. If we beheld a million together—and to see such a crowd we should have to ascend to some great height and look abroad over a vast plain crowded almost to the line of the sky—it would seem to us as though the whole world must be gathered together. Yet fourteen thousand such immense multitudes would be needed to marshall the numbers

of living men. Every one of them, who has reached the age of consciousness and reflection, is aware of certain griefs and trials of his own. Some indeed are light-hearted and comparatively free from care, others are plunged in the depths of inexpressible misery. But one and all have their share of suffering. Multiply even the average grief of men by fourteen hundred million and then compare your individual trials to this immense sum of sorrows!

It is needless to continue and try to conceive the total of history. Every generation has its own share of grief, and how many such generations have lived and suffered and passed away. What is our suffering compared to theirs? The woes which now may seem so important to ourselves, set in the midst of this immense universe of affliction, dwindle and wane by comparison like a candle set among the stars. Lift your eyes to heaven of a summer's night and ask what show the faint light in your window would make among those galaxies. Even so, your sorrows would shine among the sorrows of mankind. Pity the griefs of other men, of those about you, of those of your country, of the world, of history, and in that great compassion your individual smarts will be ashamed and vanish away.

But the noblest, most precious fruit of true compassion is not merely to assuage our personal sorrow. It is rather to relieve and help the misfortunes of

other men. That expansion of the heart, that sudden clarifying of the vision, that instinctive lifting of the eyes to look pityingly and with understanding upon others' wounds, is a grace given us not merely for our own sake, but for the profit and aid of our neighbors. Indeed, it is the first in a chain of graces. From compassion and sympathy comes the desire to help and comfort the sorrowing. From this desire springs the will of service. With such a true will to comfort and bring solace to those about us, we become good Samaritans, binding up the wounds of those we find beaten, bleeding and distressed, lying beside our way. This practical service for the relief of sorrow is the choice fruit of the blossoming of our compassion.

We have all a certain tenderness of heart which makes us capable of compassion, and enough nobleness of nature to respond to the impulse to comfort the sorrowful when we are sensible of their misery. If the realization of the griefs of others can pierce through that outer crust of indifference which hedges about our hearts, it will touch us to pity and to helpful action. Unhappily our own affairs are too engrossing. The more need to attend particularly to the sorrows of others and to respond with care to those impulses of divine grace which shatter the barriers about our hearts and let in compassion.

Once alive to the affliction about us, and sensible

of our own power to help relieve it, we shall not be long in making noble efforts to console and assist those whom we find within the reach of our influence. And if mere compassion with others' sufferings is a balm for our own distress, the actual effort to relieve their affliction is far more effective in making us forget and disregard our own misfortunes. Have you ever known anyone whose energies were sincerely given to relieving and helping the woes of others, and who had any disposition to repine at or dwell upon his own personal trials?

One last word concerning this active exercise of mercy which should be the fruit of our compassion. It is good always to remember that God has put in our grasp an almost infinite power of helping others. Some few we may effectively aid and console by our personal ministrations. But to a far greater multitude our compassion can go forth and minister consolation by the all-powerful aid of prayer. Prayer puts in our reach the omnipotence of God. Who shall set limits to what we can accomplish in consoling others by means of prayer? To pray for the afflicted and suffering throughout the entire world and for those in particular whose miseries are known to us, is an act of general and efficacious mercy more wide-reaching in its results than we can conceive.

We should pray often and with fervor and confidence, for all who are in affliction. To read or

hear of any misfortune should start in our soul an answering outcry of prayer that will rise to the throne of God and win His instant assistance for those who are the object of our compassion. The one condition which His Eternal Mercy has placed for the outpouring of its favors is, that He be asked to bestow good things on those in need. "Ask and it shall be given you." If to ask for ourselves means surely to receive from His ready bounty, shall not our petitions for others win for them also His blessings? Such prayers have the added merit and efficacy of Christian charity. Nay, He will more readily answer our prayers for ourselves if He sees us insistent in praying also for others.

Such are some of the good things which this precious quality of Christian compassion can ensure us if only we open our hearts wide to the influence of the Holy Spirit and give ourselves over to that feeling for others' sorrows which makes us so like the pitying Saviour of mankind. When next we see some neighbor in distress, or feel the sweet tide of compassion rising in our heart, let us yield ourselves to that blessed grace, and help and pray for the afflicted. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

GOD'S GREAT EXPERIMENT

HOMELY comparisons sometimes help us very powerfully to understand great spiritual truths. Not long ago we were visiting an agricultural station where interesting experiments were being tried with various sorts of plants. The grounds were laid out in carefully-measured plots, and upon a sign before each plot were recorded the precise conditions of the experiment, the nature of the soil, its chemical analysis, its qualities and disadvantages, the character and quantity of the fertilizer which had been given to each plant, the nature of the plant itself, and the time of planting. All this was recorded with an exactness and a care strange to the uninitiated. Our friend, the master of the station, considered each plot with an interested and appraising eye, and was eloquent in his explanations. We stopped before a space on which some clover was trying bravely to make a showing, but with pitiful success. The plants were thin and spindling,. The yield was sparse and poor, and we remarked to the master of

the station, "That plant seems not to be making a good record for itself."

He gazed reflectively at the placard. "Ah, yet, it is," said he. "Considering the wretched nature of the soil, and that we have supplied no cultivation and very little fertilizer, this brave little plant is doing very well, indeed. In fact, we can recommend it now for barren lands because where another sort of clover would not grow at all, this will produce a fairly good crop and without any attention whatsoever."

So in spite of its mean appearance this plant was making rather a good record for itself, by its success in growing at all under such adverse circumstances.

We passed another plant. It was luxuriant and green, and the grain stood deep in sturdy rows.

"Ah, there," said I, "is a successful growing. Surely you are going to give that plant a high rating, indeed!"

Again my guide looked at the placard.

"No," said he, "not at all. In fact, I am afraid we shall have to reject this variety, or rate it very low, because you will notice that in this plot the very best of fertilizer has been given in just the proper quantity, and it has been watered besides and tended with unusual care. So, though the grain looks high and strong, it is not doing half as well as

might be expected. With all that care and advantage of soil and moisture we should have three times this crop by now."

So we went on, meeting everywhere surprises. What looked like an extremely creditable growth proved, on investigation of all the particulars, to be rather a wretched showing in return for all the care that had been lavished upon it; while time and again plants which seemed to be fit only for rejection, were getting an excellent average because they were doing so well under adverse circumstances.

If one considers a bit, this experience is a parable of the spiritual life. How many men and women become exceedingly discouraged because they do not make a better showing in the things of the soul! How many others are inclined to judge severely and to condemn those about them, because they consider the virtue of others weak, and their growth in the spiritual life intolerably slow. But remember, we ourselves are God's great experiment. Who knows, how do even we ourselves know, just what conditions of soil and moisture and cultivation God has put for us and for others, and just how much yield the great Husbandman expects from what He has bestowed? The merit and the rating of the plants that grew in that test station depended, not on their absolute yield, but on the showing which they made in their environment. In some similar way our

rating in the eyes of the great Husbandman of souls will depend to some degree on what yield we make to Him for the precise graces herewith He waters our soul, the soil He has set it to grow in, and the strokes He gives it with the tools of His providence.

There is much consolation in this thought, and likewise much warning. The account which each of us is to render is not precisely like the account of other men. Each one of us is to appear for a separate judgment, and in that judgment we shall be called to answer for no other graces and favors and opportunities but those special gifts which God has bestowed upon ourselves. Therefore, our constant care and unwearying solicitude should be to correspond to the graces which God is giving us, and not to repine nor grow discouraged because He is not giving us others, far more excellent perhaps in themselves, and which He is showering on those whom we see about us. Our growing is to be according to our gifts, and God allots us the grace which He wishes us to have. Our praise or our blame is to come not from what we might have received, nor for the circumstances in which God might have placed us, but from the yield which our soul has made under the actual rain of grace and dew of inspiration given to us in the very soil where God has set us to grow.

This must likewise be a warning to us not to

judge others, nor to seek to anticipate the reward or blame which they will receive from Almighty God. Because they, too, are part of God's great experiment. He has put each one of them in that particular plot of ground, and given to each those gifts and advantages which are necessary to try and test that special soil. As we do not know the condition of its tillage, nor how much rain God has rained upon it, nor what cultivation He has given it, how can we dare judge its merit by the fruits that we see?

We may vary the comparison a little. Sometimes to the pupils of agricultural schools are allotted plots of ground on which they themselves are to make their experiment. To one will perhaps be given a very barren bit to cultivate, and his skill will be judged by the manner in which he handles that unpropitious soil to make it productive. Another may be given an extremely fertile plot, and his credit will be measured by his ability to bring out the full, rich yield which its fertility promises. Now we, if we wandered about among these plots of ground, would be extremely puzzled to know which tiller of the soil was getting greater credit in the eyes of his teacher, because it would be quite impossible to judge by the luxuriance of the crop or the looks of the field, just what proportionate success was being achieved, since we should not know

the conditions against or in favor of each experimenter.

It is so, too, with the affairs of the soul. God gives to each of us our plot of ground to till and work on, and to some He gives exceedingly stony ground. Their characters are hard, unyielding, unresponsive to spiritual motives. They are a barren plot and need to be dug and fertilized and watered and walled about, before they will produce even a few blades of spiritual growth. On the other hand, God gives to others deep, rich, and fertile souls full of natural goodness, like that of St. Bonaventure, of whom it was said that he seemed not to have fallen in Adam—so holy were his impulses, so kind was his heart, and so spiritual his nature. Yet the merit of each one depends not directly upon what sort of soil God has given him to cultivate, but on what use he makes of what God has given. Many a one will shine in glory before the angels and the saints because out of a stony, harsh, and barren soil he has with huge labor and many tears and much sweat brought forth fruit worthy of the kingdom of heaven.

These reflections should be a great consolation to us, because they show that our merit does not depend altogether on the outward results of all our efforts and trials, but rather on the endeavor we make and on the energy we develop. One need

never repine at having been given by God's providence a harsh and difficult nature, troublesome to till and hard to cultivate, because the reward that we shall receive and the credit that we shall have in the eyes of God and His saints for all eternity, will not depend upon the soil, but upon the tillage; not upon what we have received from God, but upon the proportionate return we have made Him for His gifts.

The lives of some of the saints show this truth in a singular way. It is told of St. Jerome that his was a harsh, irascible and difficult nature, and it was only by extreme mortification and constant vigilance, that he repressed the fierce outbursts of his stormy temper. You remember, perhaps, the tale of that Pope who was one day walking through the galleries of the Vatican, when he came upon a picture of St. Jerome, in which the Saint is represented beating his breast with a stone.

"Ah, Jerome, Jerome," said the Pope, looking thoughtfully at the picture, "you would never have been a saint were it not for the stone!"

It was only by the severest tilling, by constantly harrowing his flesh with penance and mortification, that St. Jerome succeeded in rising to the glory of the saints. So, too, it was said of St. Francis de Sales, the sweetest of men, that admirable missionary, the unction of whose words and the tenderness of

whose address made him miraculously effective in winning heretics to the Faith, that his natural character was exceedingly harsh and severe. Indeed, he confessed himself that the soil of his heart was exceedingly stony and hard, and it was only through years of deliberate endeavor, that he became the image of gentleness and sweetness which history declares him to have been.

"I have been many years," he said, "storing up in my heart a little drop of sweetness and of charity."

Once, when a young man was brought to him to be severely reprimanded for his incorrigible wickedness, the Saint's gentle reproaches failed to move his heart. The young man went away impenitent, and his friends came to St. Francis and remonstrated that he had not been more severe with him.

"Why did you not scold the lad?" they said.

"Ah, well," said St. Francis, "I have been such a long time gathering into my heart a little drop of honey, that I do not dare to be harsh even for a moment and with such a wicked young man, for fear that I should lose in that instant the little drop of sweetness and charity which I have been so many years in acquiring. Besides," he added, "if the young man is not moved by tenderness and sweetness, no reproaches will correct him."

One can fancy the long endeavor, the patient vigilance, the unremitting watchfulness and effort

with which the Saint gradually changed his harsh and difficult character until he became the model of gentleness and sweetness which we know. Here was, indeed, a glorious tilling, a happy experiment, a most successful farming of the heart, and one can picture the reward St. Francis must have received from God in heaven, for having so marvelously drawn the sweet flowers of Christian charity out of the stony infertility of a mind and heart inclined by nature to uncharitableness and wrath.

The lives of many of the other saints tell of similar achievements. Some of them were perhaps inferior to ourselves in certain natural gifts of character, and in the tenderness of their heart and the docility of their mind. But they were unwearying laborers in the field which God gave them, and by dint of constant effort and unremitting watchfulness, they succeeded in raising great fruits for God, where we perhaps are letting the better soil of our own hearts and souls lie fallow and run to weeds.

In the lands of Asia one sees, so travelers tell us, examples of the most marvelous cultivation. The Chinese, for example, can support whole populations on fields which in our land would be abandoned and let run wild. But the secret of this marvelous success is unremitting toil. These tillers

go down on their knees to work over every foot of earth, and lift and pulverize it with their fingers. They apply to the soil every bit of nourishment that they can gather, and they work it in well, and watch and weed and cultivate until even a barren soil grows docile and productive with such unremitting labor. So, too, the great monasteries of Europe were often built in wildernesses which the holy monks, by endless toil, made to blossom like the rose.

In some such way we must cultivate the soil of our hearts. The more barren it seems, the more we must work over it. The more stony it is, the more we must labor to pick out the stones, pebble by pebble. By the practice of the particular examen of conscience, by frequent confession and communion, by constant aspirations and the renewing of good resolves, we can make the harsh land docile, and wring much fruit from the sterile soil. Let us, therefore, in moments of discouragement, remember that we have all that God wishes us to have for His great experiment. He has marked out the soil, given us the due nourishment, and provided moisture and conditions for our trial. We need nothing more than what we have, for the great Master can suffer nothing to be wanting for the successful conduct of His supreme experiment. All

we need do is to make good use of what God has given us, and to raise proportionate fruits from the soil He has entrusted to our care.

In like manner, when we are tempted to grow critical of others and to wonder why they are not more virtuous and more pious, let us remember that they, too, are working out in their own way God's great experiment. They have their own trials and graces, their own natural dispositions and opportunities. They are to be judged not by your standards, but according to what they themselves have received. It is quite impossible, then, for you to pass a just judgment on them, because you cannot know the conditions of God's great experiment with their souls.

PICKING AT PEOPLE

THERE is an odious fault, too common among the sins of speech, which is named detraction. The very word is immensely significant, for it means taking away, picking off, demolishing bit by bit another's reputation. It consists in tearing down our neighbor's good name, as it were, brick by brick, or stone by stone. It is done, usually, by mean little remarks and sly insinuations, or by seemingly harmless statements and allusions no one of which seems to do much damage, though each of them tends to pull away just a little more of the good repute and kind esteem enjoyed by the object of it and make him just a little less estimable, praiseworthy or amiable than he was before the sly word was uttered or the mean remark let fall.

There is no ordinarily decent person possessed of common self-respect who would not blush to be guilty of the habit of detraction. Yet, alas! it is all too usual to find even good persons who have let themselves slip little by little into a habit of detraction. And if this picking at their neighbors'

characters is so craftily done and so cunningly glossed over as to escape the notice of others and even of the detractor himself, it is all the more dangerous. The most effective sort of detraction is the kind which does not come into the open, but is disguised under various cloaks of good humor, harmless chat or innocent-seeming personalities.

Were the thing itself not so dark and dangerous and so pitiful in its consequence it would be an amusing study to trace out and unmask the manifold disguises of detraction, and the shrewd ways detractors have of giving, each in characteristic fashion, their wicked strokes at other people's characters. Their approach to their subject and their method of delivering the swift, decisive peck which takes away so neatly just that desired morsel from the victim's character, reminds one irresistibly of fowls about a ruddy apple. Toss them a fine perfect fruit and watch them eat it. Each one will take only a tiny luscious bit with each peck of its greedy beak. But in a very little time the apple is all pecked away.

We are all more or less exposed to this ignoble vice of detraction, and, so, it is profitable to study its symptoms, not so much to diagnose them in others, as to detect them in ourselves. The very itch to be talking about other people, and the great fondness for conversation which mostly turns on

their doings and sayings, is in itself a probable sign of danger of detraction. Unless we are exceptional persons possessed of that rare and sweet delight in praising others and emphasizing their good qualities, our taste is likely to incline to personal remarks that have a tang of bitterness in them. To speak about others much, and to do it charitably and sweetly, is a difficult achievement. The serpent of detraction nests in the lush weeds of much talk about other people.

Moreover, it is toward our friends and familiars, the people with whom we associate and live, that we are most likely to feel this impulse to detraction. There seems a perverse instinct in us to disparage others at least in little things. Living intimately with others we necessarily detect the flaws and follies that are in every character. Perhaps it consoles us for what we know is amiss in our own selves, to roll under our tongue some phrase that points out or emphasizes what we think wrong in others. At all events, experience and history and all the muses, assure us that detraction is one of the most deeply rooted and universal temptations of mankind.

Needless to say, the fact that what we tell of our neighbor to his discredit is the truth, and even that it is already known to others, is no excuse for us in telling it without good reason. Even though it is true and known, we should not point it out save

for good cause, and our emphasizing it, will make others think less of the unhappy object of our detraction. We must do unto others as we would have them do unto us; and how anxious we are that others should overlook our faults, even the known ones. Let us be equally merciful ourselves.

The wicked art of detraction has many professors, and its technique is various and shrewd. It sometimes veils its approach under an assumed compassion: "Isn't it too bad about So-and-So," the story will begin; "he is such a good fellow, but——" And with the introduction follows some remark that leaves in the hearer's mind a conviction that So-and-So is anything but good. The good we predicated of him is indefinite and noncommittal. The evil we make quite definite and plain. So the result of our remark is to peck away just that bit of the esteem our victim had in the mind of the one we are speaking to, and to leave him just that much the poorer in his friend's regard.

Another method of detraction no less effective, is to repeat some remark or opinion of another to his discredit, merely as a matter of information of course, but with such a manner and intonation as leaves it to be understood how foolish the poor thing is and how much, in our superior good sense, we feel for him. "So-and-So says," is a characteristic introduction to this species of detraction. What we

think of what he says, and what our hearer should think of it, is conveyed quite definitely by our look and intonation.

Akin to this method is the similar observation concerning something which another has done. "Did you hear what poor So-and-So did the other day?" Poor So-and-So indeed! He will be poorer still, so far as reputation for good sense is concerned, before we have gotten through with him. And a sad thing about this method of detraction is, that we leave the one to whom we speak so little chance for evading it or turning it aside. It is a sort of compliment to the other to suppose that he will see at once poor So-and-So's quite obvious foolishness. It puts both speaker and listener upon a plane of comfortable superiority, from which they look down with compassion upon the unmasked folly of the unhappy So-and-So.

What is the motive which makes us forever anxious to peck a bit at the good esteem of other people? Is it enthusiasm for the right? Is it the praiseworthy desire that everyone should get his due? Is it the eagerness we feel that our neighbors should be warned about the faults of others and avoid them? Even these worthy ends would be no excuse for us to dissect and expose the poor little human failings that might mercifully escape the notice of others if we were not so eager to point them

out. We are to do to others as we would like others to do to us, and which of us wishes to be the object of detraction, to be pecked at by sharp and injurious tongues?

But if our motive is to lessen the object of our detraction by ever so little in the esteem of his neighbors, what an unworthy object that is, to be sure! Who of us is so perfect, so wise, so great in himself and so esteemed by others, that his reputation needs to be pecked at to restore it to some measure of the truth? At best, our faults are glaring enough in themselves, and there is not too much praise and good-will abroad. For us to give ourselves the pain and the guilt of lessening the good repute of others, is an unnecessary as well as unkind proceeding.

Why do we enjoy rolling on our tongue some remark of a disparaging sort about another? Surely, it is not our noble selves that like to utter or to hear detraction. It is some base, obscure but strong impulse of that lower nature which so pestiferously besieges us to do unworthy things. Do we feel, in the deeps of our littleness, that to pull someone down a peg will be to lift ourselves up by just so much in the general estimation? It is not so, of course. Detraction is a mean trait, which disgusts others, though they in their own littleness may take some passing and unworthy pleasure in listening to

it. But if we are wise, we shall neither take nor give that base delight of pecking at other people.

It is a sorry responsibility this, to be retailing the little or greater faults of others, known already or unknown. Just as when we praise what is worthy, right and good, we become in some sort partakers in the merit of it, abettors and seconders of the excellences we approve and speak well of; so when we reveal the little faults or point out the defects of others, we become sharers in the disedification, harm and scandal our foolish words reveal. We redouble, by repeating them, the faults of others, and multiply our neighbors' shortcomings on our own foolish lips. What an entirely harmful and silly proceeding! As though there were not enough fair, worthy, interesting and profitable subjects of thought and conversation to occupy whatever time we have for conferring with others, instead of using those precious moments in raking up defects and telling of faults, like crows that feed on carrion when ripe fruit hangs within reach.

The result of detraction is exceedingly bad on our own characters and dispositions, on the ones who hear us, and on the unhappy victims of our picking tongues. To ourselves, when we indulge in it, detraction brings guilt; regret, if we have a right conscience, and, it may be, the duty of reparation. It begets in us the ugly habit of seeing the worst in

others, and spying even upon their hidden faults, which at least should be mercifully left in concealment. It tends to make us careless about correcting our own faults, because we are so busy thinking of the faults of others. All in all, it is a wretchedly profitless, sinful, foolish investment of our time and of the precious gift of speech that was given us for such God-like purposes.

These may seem strong words, but they are not too strong to point out in its true folly and meanness this too common and ruinous habit of detracting speech. The next time we feel like holding up whether for public amusement or in serious talk the defects of some one of our neighbors, let us pause a moment before uttering the unkindly speech and ask ourselves if we are really willing to be detractors and to take from others that good esteem which we are so unwilling to have taken from ourselves. We say things so lightly sometimes, which are freighted with such serious consequences! Not by all the effort in the world could we blot out of men's minds the bitter word spoken half in jest but which marred a reputation, or gather back again the flying phrase which we have thoughtlessly coined against another, but which has flown from lip to lip and made havoc with a once fair name.

For our own sake, too, no less than for the sake of others, we should desire to be free from this vice of

picking at reputations. We should resent extremely the accusation that we are habitually inclined to say evil of others, a retailer of discreditable bits of gossip. Yet such is the weakness of our human nature that we have most of us to exercise some little diligence to be quite free at all times from the sorry vice of picking at other people. It needs a fine, continual charity, a love of others that is universal and sincere, the keen sorrow for their defects, and the deep appreciation of their goodness, that only the love of God, and of man for the love of God, can engender, to keep us quite completely from the dangerous and pitiful pastime of picking at other people.

GOD'S SILENCE

TO THE thoughtful mind there are few things more amazing in this astonishing universe than the silence of God. This is God's house, which He has built. The earth and the heavens are His handiwork, and with the most minute care He regulates each detail of the world. Even our own weak senses, unaided by the shrewd peerings of science, tell us with what tremendous precision God governs His universe. We can perceive how marvelously the unspeakable multitude of creatures that we see about us, the plants and flowers and trees, the animals and insects, and man himself, the summit and compendium of all God's visible creation, are constantly kept in existence and regulated in their action by the omnipotent skill and unsleeping diligence of their Master, God.

But when science, with its wide outlook into the endlessly great and the infinitesimally small, reveals to us the full sweep of God's creation, tells us of the immeasurably distant stars that sprinkle unthought-of voids of space to the limit of an unim-

aginate creation, and shows as well that there is a less within the little, and that the mites we see are giants compared to the lesser world of the microscope and the whirling host of atoms; then to our vision the universe becomes a bewildering and awful sum of greatness and littleness. We then achieve some faint realization, if our imaginations are vivid and our minds are clear, of the huge complexity, the almost infinite machinery, so to say, which God has set up in His universe.

All this wide array of heaven and earth is destined for the indwelling of man. He is the apex of the universe, the peak of creation, the voice through which all this voiceless and soulless wonder praises God. On man, therefore, is concentrated the interest and solicitude of his Creator. The fourteen or fifteen hundred millions of reasonable creatures who swarm on the world are objects of God's unsleeping interest and particular care.

Yet, while Almighty God is everywhere, all-present, all-knowing, and all-holy, closer to men than their own souls and more intimately acquainted with the workings of their hearts than their own conscience, still through all this huge house of God there reigns a wonderful silence. God has appointed His laws and written them in the human heart. Man, by atrocious and manifold sins, dis-

dains His Maker, insults the Lawgiver and uses the good gifts of God for wickedness.

What an awful sum of horror and shame man has written through the ages upon this fair world, which is destined only to aid him to praise and glorify God through faithful service! Age cries out to age with dismay at the thoughtlessness, the wickedness, the wantonness, of the men of each succeeding generation. Through it all, God remains silent. He has, indeed, spoken thrice to mankind. After Adam's sin He gave that forefather of our race the promise of a Redeemer. When He brought into being the nation of the Jews, He entrusted to them the ancient testament of God with men concerning this promise of the Saviour, and gave by His prophets the teaching of the Old Testament. Last, by the lips of His Son made Flesh, He spoke to us the full and authentic truth which was to set all men free unto salvation. But for the rest, God remains silent in His universe.

There is nothing more impressive than this silence of God, ever-present, ever-watching, ever-remembering with an infallible and perfect memory all our deeds, yet waiting in silence. The nations rise up against His law, and wanton in wickedness and sin, and God maintains His silence. The house of His world is defiled with wickedness, the years

grow on and bring each one a new weight of retribution—and God remains silent. Crimes cry out to Heaven for vengeance; the scream of the oppressed splits the skies; the wail of the widow and of the orphan ascends to Heaven and God still remains silent. The Church is oppressed and her ministers are persecuted. The Sisterhoods are driven out from lands, the poor are despoiled of their possessions, the young are deprived of their faith by Godless education, and the old are led astray by manifold and systematic temptations from men more powerful for evil than the prince of evil himself—and still, God remains silent. The good look up to Heaven and groan in spirit, beseeching Him for some manifestation that will strike terror in the heart of evil-doers and justify His Church before the world, and still God remains silent.

Yet, withal, this infinite, all-holy and all-powerful Lord is searching the heart of the sinner, sees more clearly the wickedness of men than do their own consciences, and is utterly aware of all that mankind has done to spoil His house, to wreck His possessions, to defeat His designs in the world. What, then, is the meaning of this tremendous silence? What is the significance of God's delay? Why is there no voice on earth and no call from

the heavens? Why is God silent so long while His enemies seem to make havoc in His house? Only our Faith can give us the true answer.

To the pagans of old this silence of God was most depressing, and clouded all their hope and joy. They grew to think that God had no longer an interest in His world and that, having made this marvelous earth and set it spinning in the grooves of space, He had forgotten us and left human destinies to work themselves out in blind confusion, careless of those whom He had made. They pictured to themselves a gloomy and dim hereafter, where the shades of men should mope in shadow in the underworld, only stirred to life by the blood of the offerings that trickled down and momentarily fed them to consciousness. But we, who are Christians, have in this very silence of God a motive both for holy fear and holy hope. God is silent because He is waiting for the consummation to come, which shall restore all things according to His will and glory.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and neither are His ways our ways. When He made the world, He knew most perfectly all things which would come to pass, either through the action of inevitable forces of nature, or from the free will of men. The world is God's great experiment, where He tries the souls of men to see whether they will serve and

love Him, or abandon and defy Him. All this huge earth, spinning on in its manifold changes, with all the interlacing and interacting of the affairs and wills of men, is but the course of God's providence, in which with unerring skill and perfect power He is suffering His elect to work out their salvation, and is proving the souls of all mankind so that they may themselves write out their own eternal destiny.

Therefore it is, that God is silent. He is silent as the father is silent who has given his command and waits for his son to obey it. He is silent as the lawgiver is silent who, having clearly enunciated his will and pleasure, waits to see whether those to whom it is addressed will obey and receive reward, or disobey and meet inevitable punishment. The silence of God is not the silence of indifference nor of forgetfulness, nor of contempt, nor of weariness. It is the silence of love, of tenderness, of expectancy, of interest. God waits to see how the world will respond to His commands—who will serve Him and who defy Him, who shall use the gifts that He gives, to their own salvation, or who shall turn them to condemnation and to ruin.

It is needful in the designs of God, that this great silence should brood over the world, for it is God's purpose to win our hearts' allegiance through our own free choice; not through fear only, but through love. Pondering on the silence of God, we should

become more keen to attend to and to heed those things which God's voice has already spoken. The voice of the Church rings through the world, weighted with the authority of God Himself: a loud call in the ears of the nations. The voice of our conscience sounds within us, constantly exhorting and admonishing, encouraging and restraining, teaching us the ways of God. The voices of prudent and wise teachers proclaim the wonders of God's love and the majesty of His power; the voice of our own body and soul cry out to us of God's goodness and providence.

These things all call to our hearts to serve God and to love Him. The day approaches when the time which God has measured for us shall have run out, and we shall stand at the vestibule of eternity in the presence of our Creator. Then we shall hear His voice. At that moment the silence of God will be over. His time of waiting will have been accomplished. We shall have answered, by our deeds, this all-important question, "Wilt thou love Me and wilt thou serve Me?" and with ecstatic joy and with immense relief and with a peace that no one can understand, may we hear the voice of Our Saviour, breaking the silence, with those appointed and predestined words which shall begin for us the unspeakable joys of heaven: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foun-

dation of the world." For it is in such manner and on such occasion that God has decreed to break for us the momentous silence which now is brooding in His house of the world.

CURING OUR HABITS

IT IS odd, isn't it, how a habit can resist a resolution. Match them together, and the habit will win, nearly every time. Yet a resolution is such a strong, vigorous, earnest act of the sovereign will; and a habit seems such a vague, abstract and dormant entity. How is it, that in the experience of all of us, habit nearly always, in the long run, prevails over our strongest resolutions? For that it does, who will not sorrowfully acknowledge? There, perhaps, is that bad temper of yours. (No offense, for most of us mortals suffer at times from one or another variety of bad temper.) It has grown with you in your growth, and got to be a second nature. Given the occasion, you feel the old heat rising and the glow of indignation kindling as before. There you go again, saying what you hadn't intended and didn't really mean, and hurting other people's feelings and generally disgracing yourself until the fit is over. Then, the habit having triumphantly reasserted its sway, which you thought and hoped you had broken once and for all by that

last very sincere and honest resolution never to get vexed again, the choler dies away, your disposition recovers its accustomed sweetness, and you begin again to wonder sadly what was the matter with you that you flew off the handle after so earnestly resolving not to.

We pull ourselves together! Well! At least *that* is *positively* the last time. This thing has gone far enough, and we are becoming a nuisance. We elaborate a new resolution. It is specific and determined. As advised, we go into details, and foresee the occasions when we may be tempted to get angry, and we make up our minds not to—never again! We also pray, not that such a perfectly good resolution seems to need so very much prayer to make it effective, but because that is also what we have been recommended. Then, with the warm glow of anticipated virtue all over us, we sally forth nonchalantly into our accustomed haunts, feeling that this time at least we have worked up a resolution that will last, and have put that pestiferous habit of getting angry, down for good, and fortified ourselves and our temper against almost any provocation.

Alas! what commonly happens? A little rub—somebody just scratches the surface of our adamantine resolution, and it shatters to fragments. Out pops temper again. In half an hour we have gone through the same ridiculous proceeding of getting

mad, growing sad, and making another resolution. Yet, on examining our resolve with all the serious introspection we can muster, we certainly perceive that it was an entirely sincere and pretty strong resolve. We were absolutely determined to break off that habit, and we even foresaw perhaps the very occasion which, when encountered, was the undoing of us. What, then, is the matter? Can we not break our bad habits? Or is it an illusion that we really mean not to yield to them again?

Changing the name of the failing, this is the history of every struggle against bad habits that was ever waged since the world began, save in those rare and altogether exceptional cases where divine grace took the place of nature and rooted out a bad habit all of a sudden, or where one prodigious act of the will was so exceptionally strong that it did reverse the effect of many preceding actions and turn the habit out of doors with a single tremendous effort. Barring these unusual experiences, however, all mankind, in every age, will but repeat the story we have just told of struggle, resolve and failure in the battle between will and habit, even where the persevering will does finally conquer in the end. What, then, is the matter with us? Is not our will as strong as consciousness declares? Above all, is there no use resolving?

We shall be able to answer all these important

and vexatious questions for ourselves if we go a bit deeper into the nature of habits, and think how they are formed and by what laws they are ruled. Far from discouraging us from trying to cure our bad habits and to cultivate good ones, the knowledge will be a guide and encouragement in our lifelong battle with ourselves. What, then, is a habit, and what are its laws of action? To begin with, there is a proneness in us to do again what we have done many times before. "How use doth breed a habit in a man!" cried Valentine in "The Two Gentleman of Verona," and we must often have reëchoed his observation. By merely repeating the same mode of action it becomes a part of our very self to incline to do the same thing again, and, acquiring as we do a whole series of these ways of acting, they become for us a second nature, which fits us like a garment and clings to us as though it were part of our own flesh and souls. Our ways of speaking, curiously reflect this conviction that our habits are our very dress and vesture. "Habit," meaning a wonted way of acting and "habit," meaning dress, come from the identical root of language, and so do "custom" and "costume" in similar meanings.

Every time we act, we acquire a disposition to repeat the action; and this disposition, often yielded to, hardens into habit, a proneness and inclination to act in the same way again when similar circum-

stances arise. "By habit," says Sully in his *Psychology*, "we mean a fixed disposition to do a thing and a facility in doing it, the result of numerous repetitions of the action." This is as true of good actions as of bad ones, of the body as of the soul. When we master ourselves, we acquire a disposition to and habit of self-control; when we pray, we cultivate the habit of prayer; when we are idle, we get habits of idleness; and when we perform many acts of kindness, we grow habitually kind.

It is easy enough to see the providential purpose of this facility of our human nature for forming habits, fixed and customary ways of acting. Without it we should have no stability in our acts or our lives. It gives a man assurance of persevering in good, just as it punishes him with an ingrained retribution for yielding to evil. We are fickle enough as it is, but without habits to steady us, we should be badly off indeed. What confidence could a man have that tomorrow, on some slight whim, or sudden impulse, or importunate temptation, he would not madly abandon all the good ways he had been keeping for fifty years, and rush off into some folly that his sober senses would abhor, if the strong chain of habit did not hold him at anchor to the things he had deliberately chosen to tie to. What we call a good character, a firm disposition, a noble nature, is in fact dependent on a whole fabric of good habits

that have been built up by repeated actions of the virtues to which they incline. On the other hand, as we have hinted, bad habits are a swift and fitting retribution for the doing of bad deeds. With every yielding to sin or to some ill impulse, there is strengthened in a man the corresponding habit; and, so, a bad character is in fact the direct consequence and punishment of bad actions which begot the habits that go to make up the evil character.

But where is the consolation and the help in these reflections, toward making our good resolutions overcome our bad habits? Just in this, that they point out the effective means for rooting them out and implanting the contrary virtues. A bad habit must be overcome by reversing the process by which it was created. A good habit must be implanted by the very means by which the bad habit was rooted out. What process and what means is this? The means of repeated and deliberate actions, which are the result of repeated and strong resolutions, persistently acted on and perseveringly renewed.

Let us take, first of all, the process of rooting out a bad habit. Recur for instance to the example which we have already used, the bad habit of getting angry. What we say of this may with appropriate variations be applied to the getting rid of any bad habit whatsoever. We may as well make up our mind at the start, that the changing of a

habit is not to be the affair of a few days. If we have an extraordinarily strong will, the battle will be briefer. But no one need ordinarily expect that a fat and comfortable habit, which has been years in growing and is twined in with all the fibers of our nature, is to give up meekly and be bundled out of doors on the first trial. It took a long time to root it so firmly; it will take correspondingly long, most probably, to uproot it. We begin with a good resolution. That is to say, we honestly make up our mind to get rid of the bad habit of getting angry, and to take the necessary means thereto. We strengthen this resolution by dwelling on the motives which prompted it. The foolishness, the shameful-ness, the danger of yielding to anger. The more thoroughly we realize these motives and remember them, the more effective our resolution is likely to be. Then we try to foresee the occasions which will most likely tempt us to lose our temper, conjecturing them from what we have experienced in the past. Be quite sure that you have an honest and full determination to reform. Without this, all subsequent operations will fail. It is easy to persuade ourselves that we have really formed a good resolution, when in fact we have only the wish to form one.

Well, then, *after* the sincere resolve has been formed, please take notice, and not in the mere forming of it, the true work begins, and it consists in per-

forming action after action against the old habit, and, better still, in the direction of the contrary virtue. You are provoked. You begin to get hot all over. Warm words come to your lips. You are just about to boil over again. What ho! Now is the time to begin breaking that habit in good earnest. You recall that honest resolution. You say a short, strong prayer for aid. Then you deliberately crush down that rising resentment, you hold in the bitter word, you force yourself to go away, count a hundred, swallow a glass of water—anything but yield to that old passion and habit of anger. The fit passes. You have kept your resolution for once at least. You did not yield to the habit that time.

What is the consequence? Not only that single meritorious victory, that success in self-control where you have so often failed before, but a distinct and definite weakening of the *habit* of getting angry. You have less of the bad habit than you had before. You have made a beginning in acquiring the contrary habit of gentleness, meekness and self-control. Perhaps the next time you are tempted, you may yield and become thoroughly angry before you remember your resolution. But you pull up, and try to calm yourself, and manage somehow not to yield entirely to anger. Just so much more of the habit has been conquered. By the repetition of such victories, unremittingly persevered in, the habit will

at last be broken, demolished, overcome, and a good custom put in its place. Every time you resist, it is so much the more weakened. Every act against it destroys its dominion by so much the more.

It is the same way with the cultivation of virtues; first a good, well-motivated, prayerful resolution, then act after act of the good habit we desire. At first the acts may be hard, awkward, painful even, and may seem to be having no effect upon our soul. But perseverance will bring more and more ease and readiness in the performance of the good action, and sooner or later we shall find that our character is enriched by the acquisition of a new virtue, firmly planted and flowering into noble deeds. Ah, if all of us, and particularly the young, whose characters are just forming, would only realize that every unworthy deed is making an evil nature for us, and every good one building up a holy virtue in our souls, how careful we would be about the beginnings. We are the builders of our own characters and dispositions, and it is done, for good or evil, not by our wishes or even our worthy resolutions, but by the habit-forming efficacy of every conscious and deliberate act that we perform.

A SIGNIFICANT WORD

A VERY great deal is said nowadays, and very well said too, concerning various apostolates. "Lay Apostolate" is one of the most used of terms, and the general idea conveyed by this expression is made particular in the titles of a very host of lay apostolates. There is the apostolate of the press, the apostolate of catechetical instruction, the apostolate of social service, the apostolate of speech, of good example, of lecture courses, of sacred art, of apologetics, of the drama, and so on through a whole series of very much needed and truly apostolic spheres of action for the¹ laity. Much is said of the need of all these things, and many excellent reasons are given why all good Catholics should enlist in at least one of these holy spheres of effort. But perhaps the most moving reasons and the most cogent arguments for the lay apostolate may be found in a consideration of the meaning of the term itself.

The word "apostle," as everyone knows who has studied catechism, means a messenger. An apostle,

in general, is one who is sent out to carry some tidings. The title, apostle, was therefore given to those twelve lowly men whom Christ chose to be the messengers or bearers forth of the good tidings of salvation, the carriers of His Gospel in His name to all mankind. Because the Twelve were called apostles, the terms apostolic and apostolate have got a specially sacred meaning in the Catholic Church. Those things are called apostolic, which have to do with the persons of the apostles or their office or mission, and whatever concerns the carrying abroad of their Gospel or the bringing of men to the Faith of Christ, is therefore styled apostolic. Following out the commands of their Lord, the Twelve instructed and sent forth others whom they laid their hands on and ordained, some to be full successors of the apostles, the bishops, others to be ministers of the sacraments and teachers of the people, yet not with all the powers of bishops; and these latter are priests. Both the bishops and the priests have an apostolic mission and office, the priests in part, the bishops in its fullness, and it is their special duty to be messengers of Christ and carry His good tidings, His Gospel, to the peoples of the earth.

These good tidings of Christ are the tidings of the world's salvation, and His message is the message of eternal life. Christ came on earth to accomplish the most sublime of all works, the salvation of souls.

He is the world's Redeemer and His holy Faith and the teachings of His Church, which His apostles and their delegates carry abroad, are designed to save the souls of mankind. The apostolic ministry, the ministry, that is, of the bishops and priests of the Church, is the service of saving souls. It is the profession of these men, ordained and consecrated to carry on the work of Christ, that they be ever at work for the salvation of souls. Through them, in the ordinary providence of God, the members of the human race are to be baptized, taught the word of God and brought to serve Him faithfully. They and they alone have the power to administer the sacraments of Penance, Extreme Unction, Confirmation, Holy Orders. They only can celebrate the august sacrifice of the Mass, and be the Church's witnesses of Matrimony. In so far then, their apostolic ministry can be shared with no one outside the holy order of the priesthood. These mighty means for the saving of souls are in the hands of those ordained to be the ministers of Christ.

But besides these specific and distinctive functions of the apostolic ministry, there is a world of ways in which Christ's message may be brought to men, the salvation of souls labored for and achieved, and thus the work of the apostles carried on in the world. Not only by the direct administration of the sacraments, but in every manner in which the teaching

of our Saviour can be brought home to men, their hearts turned to His law and their souls made clean and holy, one may do the work of the apostles. Besides the apostolate of priests, therefore, there have arisen in the Church manifold other apostolates which mightily help to the carrying forth of Christ's message and the saving of souls.

Foremost among these is, of course, the apostolate of the life of religion, whereby many hundreds of thousands of Catholic men and women have consecrated their whole being to God's service and to the salvation of souls by taking the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, crucifying in their hearts the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life, and giving their whole lifetime to the spreading of Christ's message, by prayer, by personal example and by their incessant labor for the salvation and sanctification of those who come within their influence. It is impossible to estimate the vast extent and holy efficacy of this apostolate in the religious life. Religious communities have in our day achieved once more almost the fervor of the apostolic days. The devoted lives of countless Catholic men and women who, in self-sacrifice and self-immolation, are following the footsteps of Christ and preaching His doctrine by example and by teaching, have an efficacy

to spread the kingdom of Christ in the world and to intensify the Christian life on earth which only heaven can comprehend. How powerfully the religious Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods coöperate with the work of priests and the salvation of souls by their teaching in Catholic schools, ministering in hospitals and institutions of mercy, caring for the widow, the orphan and the destitute aged, helping the cause of Catholic literature, visiting the poor, and in a thousand zealous works widening the kingdom of God among men, no earthly intelligence can estimate. The apostolate of the religious life is in itself a moral miracle and one of the chief glories of the Church of Christ.

But outside the circle of those messengers of Christ who are either ordained to His service in the priesthood or dedicated to it in the religious life, there is a still vaster circle of apostles, members of the laity, living in the world without vows or special obligation, yet who have their own place in the providential system which God has raised up to spread the teaching of Christ, and whose apostolate is of ever-increasing importance in the times in which we are. They, too, these ordinary Catholic men and women, have a definite duty and a special part in the spreading of the good message of salvation. They are meant to take their share in passing on to others that

truth of Christ which they have received not for their own good alone, but that it may be spread through the entire world.

Of the existence of the lay apostolate as a part of the providential activities of the Church, and of its extreme importance just in this present age, who is there that can doubt? It is scarcely possible that the priest can effectively reach and speak to all the men and women of this generation who need still to be brought to the knowledge of the Faith of Christ and led into the holy ways of Catholic practice. Multitudes outside the Church will never go to hear a priest, will never be brought into any touch with Catholic teaching unless it be through good example, the tactful words, or the prudent action of some member of the Catholic laity. It would be vain to expect these people to come to Catholic churches, to call on the priest at his house, to go themselves in search of Catholic literature. They have no idea of the true character of the Church, no curiosity, it may be, to inquire concerning her teaching. They are simply indifferent or hostile to whatever is Catholic, and if they think of the Catholic Church at all, it is with uncomprehending wonder that what they consider an obsolete institution should succeed in perpetuating itself in our progressive day, or that sensible persons should con-

tinue members or what they think so timeworn and antiquated a form of belief.

Who can approach these people, can give them at least a doubt about the correctness of their own vague ideas of the Catholic Church, can set them studying Catholic belief, get them to realize something of the beauty, strength and holiness of the Spouse of Christ, persuade them to make the first difficult steps toward conversion? Who but our fervent, effective, fearless lay apostles will be able to meet them in the ordinary circumstances of life, accost them with friendliness, gain their confidence by the strong goodness of Catholic principle, which has an indescribable power of winning esteem and trust. Who but they can put them into the humor and give them the means of getting that knowledge of the Church which will be the prelude to their act of faith, and the means of bringing them to the extreme happiness here and hereafter which membership in the true Church will win for them?

It is quite astounding how little some, even among the devout faithful, seem to realize this solemn office laid upon them of leading others to the knowledge of that Faith which they themselves prize so highly, and in whose saving and consoling doctrine they so much rejoice. In their own lives their Faith is everything. Its light illumines every step they take;

its strength carries them over weary ways and through distressful places. They could not conceive of a life without the Blessed Sacrament, deprived of the consolation and cleansing of sacramental penance, orphaned of the Blessed Mother Mary, bereaved of the sweet intercession and communion of the Saints of God. Oh, why do they not realize, these pious but too self-centered, too little-zealous Catholics, that the same immense blessings in which they so much delight, are meant as well for everyone else to whom their influence can bring the saving Faith of Christ? Not for themselves alone are all these good gifts given, but for all the world. The charity that covers a multitude of sins should be fruitful in them of countless deeds of the lay apostolate. They must do unto others in this regard also, what they would that others should do unto them. Were they themselves deprived of the Faith, ignorant of its doctrines, wandering from the truth, how eagerly they would wish to have someone come to them and bring them the good tidings of great joy! Shall they, therefore, be content to keep to themselves the Faith they have received, or shall they not rather spread it abroad by every means of the lay apostolate, which they can find ready to their hand?

Through the great neglect of the opportunities of

the lay apostolate, how much glory is lost to God, how much good to souls, how much merit to those who might exercise this priceless office of bringing the truth to darkened minds and hearts! On the other hand, what strange shifts Divine Providence has to use, according to our poor imperfect way of speaking, to bring to the light those chosen souls who are to receive the grace of conversion! Some time ago we were speaking to a traveler from one of the small northern nations. There were few Catholics in his country, yet he was a convert and a student for the priesthood.

"How did you come to learn," we said, "of the truth of the Catholic Faith?"

"I was a commercial traveler," he answered, "and in my journeying I picked up a book which vehemently attacked the Catholic Church. It interested me to learn something more of an institution which seemed to arouse such intense antagonism. After much difficulty, for it was hard to meet any Catholics in that country, I succeeded in making the acquaintance of a priest, who gave me some Catholic books to read. My eyes were opened and I joyfully entered the Church."

Another convert, professor in a great American University, told us not long ago that he had been led to study the Catholic Faith when he was a stu-

dent, because of the violent attacks which one of the professors thought fit to make upon the Catholic Church.

"He abused the Church so roundly," said this convert, "that I thought it worth while to look into an organization which could excite so violent a hatred."

He too, like the other convert, was besieged by the truth, and surrendered.

If even the attacks of its enemies are efficacious to make conversions to the Church, what marvelous results might one expect from the efforts of its friends! If the grace of God is so ready to flow even through tortuous channels, how copiously and in what mighty streams would it not pour into the souls of men, if only those who are called to works of the lay apostolate were keen to do their duty.

Now, one must say it in sadness, too many of the Catholic faithful are quite neglectful of their great opportunity and solemn charge to be apostles and spread the Faith, freely giving what they have so freely received. It is hard for non-Catholics to find the truth. It is hard for inquirers to meet among the ranks of the laity willing teachers who will prepare the way for the work of the priests by acting as intermediaries between the minister of God and these starving souls. Were every Catholic to make but one conversion in a year, and were these con-

verts in turn to make each year another conversion, it would be only a very short time before the greater part of our nation would be Catholic. Does this seem too vast a good to be looked forward to? If all the faithful realized their power and were all zealous to do their part in the lay apostolate, no such results of conversion would be too vast to be expected from so sublime a harmony of effort in the cause of Christ!

WASTED RICHES

IT NEEDS a conscious effort for us to see life as God sees it, and to realize the eternal values of things. We are all enmeshed and surrounded by worldly principles, worldly views and earthly and temporal interests, and the soul has to struggle to shake off these human and natural preconceptions in order to gain a height where she can see life in its real perspective, and realize the value of things as they are in the eyes of God. One of our griefs and regrets in purgatory will, doubtless, be the wasting of so many spiritual riches, which, when they came, we did not appreciate, and which we let slip because we did not realize their value in the eyes of God. One of our surprises in heaven will be to see the preciousness and the holiness of many an earthly opportunity which, when it came, we scarcely regarded, or which we seized upon, it may be, half-listlessly and without realizing at all the vast effect that it was to have on our eternity in heaven.

Life, looked at with natural eyes, is a haphazard

thing, a constant succession of unforeseeable events, many of them out of our control. In youth, its various chances seemed delightful and interesting, but its vicissitudes pall upon us until in old age the natural man sees life as a weariness and a sorrow. The sayings of the poets and the moralizing of philosophers assure us that the promises of earth are delusive, that what seems to be joy and gladness is in truth only a little removed from grief and tears. But looked at with an understanding eye and from the supernatural viewpoint, our life is one tissue of amazing possibilities, a succession of glorious opportunities to mount higher and higher in the kingdom of heaven.

There is, let us say once more, nothing in our life which is left to chance by God's all-wise and all-loving providence. Every incident that comes to us, every experience that we meet in our way, every joy and sorrow, every trial and consolation, the wickedness of the evil and the kindness and tenderness of the good, riches and poverty, health and sickness, pain and pleasure—all these things are woven into our days with consummate skill by the infinite Artificer of our lives. In God's plan and design nothing is meaningless, nothing purposeless. All that He allows to happen to us, is meant as a priceless opportunity of pleasing Him, serving His

Divine Majesty, and so gaining merit in time and glory in eternity.

This view of life changes the whole aspect of our days. The events which seem to us humdrum, wearisome and trying, are each one of them a door into a glorious eternity. The moments which pass so swiftly and lightly and seem so insignificant in themselves, are each a golden token wherewith we may buy more of the kingdom of heaven. The trials which test us so severely, and the sorrows which sometimes seem keen enough to tear body and soul apart, are measured out to us with the greatest precision by God, and are suited to our special powers and to the exact degree of glory which God wills that we shall give Him by enduring them. Nothing in our lives, whether pleasant or painful, whether seemingly good or evil, but is intended by God to test us, to give exercise to the glorious faculties which He has given us, and to prepare us for a higher place in His kingdom for eternity.

Therefore, each trial and difficulty and pain and sorrow, each task that we find set us, each opportunity of suffering or doing for the love of God, is in truth the most precious opportunity, the most inestimable riches thrown in our way by Providence. When affairs vex us, or when friends try us, or enemies persecute us, or sickness comes, or want, or pain, or any other of the occasions in which we can

specially serve God or show resignation to His will, we should receive them as celestial visitors and seize with eagerness from their hands those heavenly riches which will endure for all eternity. If we could only realize the truth of this saying, that unto those who love God all things work together unto good, and could make full profit from the inestimable riches which God so constantly throws into our hands! But we find it so difficult to realize God's overruling providence and to understand how His love disposes all things for our merit and salvation.

Though we believe that our Father in heaven suffers nothing to pass unheeded, and mightily overrules all that comes to us, we do not realize the consequences of this conviction. Since God is all goodness and all love, since He is all wisdom and all power, it follows that in everything He must intend His own glory and our greater good. No slightest incident or circumstance of our lives but comes to us directly from our Father in heaven, and is intended and allowed and disposed by His providence so as to help us to serve Him and to give us an opportunity of gaining everlasting riches. We believe all this, but our belief has sometimes a scarcely perceptible fruit of realization with scarcely the faintest impression upon our lives.

There is an interesting incident in the life of the

venerable Bishop Flaget of Kentucky, which illustrates this point in rather an amusing way. The Bishop, in those pioneer days, acted also as parish priest of the Cathedral. There was at that time a very active member of the congregation, a lady who made it her joy to serve the Bishop by sewing for the altar. She was always ready to prepare vestments and albs and amices and whatever else might be needed for the Holy Sacrifice. Now this good dame had a sincere wish to become more holy, and was extremely interested in the lives of the saints, which she read whenever she had a moment's leisure. One day, when the Bishop called her to give her some linen for albs, she took occasion, since he was her spiritual director, to make a gentle complaint.

"Bishop," said she, "why don't you ever try me?"

"Why," said the Bishop, "just what do you mean?"

"Well," said she, "I have noticed in the lives of the saints that their spiritual directors always tried them, gave them something difficult to do, or tested their virtue by some kind of hardship. And here I have been going to confession to you and living under your spiritual direction for years and you have never tried me at all. Try me, Bishop, because I want to become a saint."

The Bishop smiled but said nothing. Sometime later the good lady appeared again with four beau-

tiful albs, exquisitely sewed and in which she had used up with skilful economy every bit of the linen that had been given her. She was proud of the work and expected to receive the usual gentle commendation. But to her surprise and indignation the Bishop looked suspiciously first at the albs and then at her.

"Now, Mrs.—, how much linen did I give you?" he asked.

The good lady bridled with indignation.

"Why, Bishop," said she, "what do you mean? Do you think that I would steal your linen? You gave me just exactly enough for those four albs, and every scrap you gave is there, and it is a wonder I could make them at all with so little. The idea—I never was accused of being a thief before in my life."

So she continued for some moments growing in indignation and in eloquence, when, in the midst of her crescendo, the Bishop suddenly interposes. Speaking in a feminine tone and repeating her own former words, he said: "Bishop, why don't you ever try me?"

The good lady stopped short. "Why, Bishop," said she, "was that a trial?"

"Of course it was a trial," said the Bishop. "Do you suppose I would ever accuse you of stealing altar linen?"

"Well," said the good lady, "all right, then, if it was only a trial. But why in the world didn't you tell me?"

We are all of us in pretty much the same attitude of mind toward God's loving providence as was this good lady toward her spiritual director. We are exceedingly willing to be tried, but we should like to be told beforehand that it is a trial—forgetting that our whole life is one continual trial, and that in all the days of our sojourn on earth God, our Father, is doing precisely what the good Bishop did at the request of his penitent. He hides His tenderness, He conceals from us sometimes His infinite solicitude, He assumes a severe appearance and hurts us with suffering and sorrow, but it is all only a trial. Behind that severe countenance of things, behind the hard outlines of our life, there is always the heart of our Father in heaven, full of tenderness, the infinite and essential love, who is trying us, gently and skilfully, but strongly and earnestly, so as to bring out the best that is in our nature and give us chance after chance of winning great glory for the world to come.

Oh, how exceedingly foolish and vain and ignorant we are, to suffer so many opportunities for heavenly riches to slip through our hands for lack of realization of the purpose of our heavenly Father! How we shall regret, when life is over and our

judgment comes, the many inestimable opportunities that we have let pass by us and have wasted, because we did not realize their preciousness for the kingdom of heaven. We should, each one, with immense earnestness and unremitting diligence, set ourselves to look out for these chances of merit, to sift out from the sands of our days the golden particles of mortification, of suffering, of effort, of prayer, which will be for us an increase of everlasting glory in heaven. We should look at each moment as it comes, as a divine messenger bearing in its hands an opportunity. If the gift seems harsh and rugged, if pain comes to us, or insult, or calumny, or the harshness of friends, or the persecution of enemies, or if our own heart tries us, or anxieties oppress, or sickness afflicts us, we should rejoice in all these things, offering them to God, realizing how great is their preciousness for heaven. For our endurance of these things with love, is the measure of our glory hereafter. Let us waste nothing of these great riches offered us by God's provident love.

ON LOOKING FORWARD

IT IS our human way to be always looking forward. Happiness and joy are seldom in the "now," but often in the "soon to be." We comfort ourselves for the dreariness or pain of the present moment, by anticipating a better day, and compensate ourselves for the present bankruptcy of consolation by drawing drafts on our future income of peace and of delight. "There will come a better time!" We say to ourselves, only half realizing, perhaps, our own mental processes: "This sorrow also will pass away. These clouds will part, and soon there will be sunny weather." So present griefs and trials become bearable because they lead to joy.

It is a harmless manner of seeking comfort, and it is based on a great truth. In this world, we are creatures of change. Time runs on with us irresistibly, and by no effort of ours can we check or even hinder his pace. The joys, the griefs of life alike are passing. The present moment may be very dear to us, but by no striving can we hold it

one instant more. It may be full of pain, but the pain is likewise fleeting, as fleeting as the pleasure that we would like to keep.

So it is natural, and in a sense it is right for us to look to the future as a solace for the present, a refuge from the cares and sorrows that vex us now. At least these especial griefs will soon have left us. They may give place to still other sorrows, but they will themselves depart. Every new day, with its new sheaf of joys, its new burden of cares, lends point to this reflection. All things are passing, and so likewise are our distresses. Only wait a while, and time will carry away pain and pleasure together.

Put in such a way, there are indeed some shreds of consolation in this thought, but not, it must be confessed, a very sure or lofty comfort for our sorrows and wearinesses. The dim horizon that surrounds us, may change indeed without becoming any brighter. It is scant solace to know that present griefs must pass, if we are at the same time assured that future trials will replace them. Not a lifetime of experience is needed to convince us that so long as we are on earth and in the vale of tears, our days will be only a change, not a surcease of suffering. We lay down one cross only to take up another, leave one rough way only to set our feet on another which may be yet more rude.

Still, we are forever looking forward. Hope

springs in us forever. Just past each dun horizon must be peace! Our hearts crave to be happy, and the very eagerness of that incessant craving begets in us the hope of some day reaching what we long for. Since we so desire to be happy, to be content, to be at rest, there must somewhere be the goal of our desire. Our way of looking forever onward is witness to our instinctive conviction of a future happiness to which we believe that we may some day attain.

But oh, we do not make use enough of that celestial prospect that lies somewhere before us, to cheer and to encourage our faltering steps along the paths of goodness! We do not look far enough ahead, nor catch clearly enough the light that streams upon us from that coming dawn! Our sight is too dim. Our gaze is fixed too low to perceive the radiance that comes to us from heaven. So we miss the great encouragement, the exceeding peace and joy what we might have by looking still farther forward along our way.

Too commonly it is only the comforts and alleviations of this life that cheer us in prospect, when we look ahead from sorrow to find consolation and peace. These things may be good enough in their way, necessary aids to us along the dusty path of toil and trouble, but their anticipation does not bring lasting satisfaction. They are too momentary and

trivial. They come and pass too swiftly. There is no substance in them to feed the incessant hunger of our souls.

But if we look from our low valleys of despondency and catch sight of the joy and peace of heaven, then we have matter indeed for deep consolation and for substantial joy. The traveler through a mountainous country, walking on over the hills and through the valleys, his heart set on the distant city, grows weary and discouraged at the roughness and difficulty of the way. Yet from time to time, toiling up steep ascents and climbing over broken paths of the mountains, he sees before him gentler stretches of his journey, where the road is shaded and smooth and there are pleasant places to walk and to rest. The distant vision allays a little the agony of his present hardships. But when, from a lofty height, after many days of weary travel, he looks at last on the city to which he has longed to come, when he sees the goal of all his longing, and thinks that in a little while he will set his weary feet on its wished-for streets, and rest his tired limbs in its peaceful places, then all the fatigue of the long way falls from him like a cloak. His pulses quicken with courage, and swinging forward he devours the way with speed. The sight of the city of his desire has made him forget all previous wearinesses, the anticipation of a speedy coming-home

has washed from his soul all the bitterness of travel.

It will be so with us, if, casting our gaze a little farther forward we will look, from time to time, on the bright city of Heaven, toward which all our steps are bent, to which all our hopes finally aspire. At the end of all our ways, the goal of all our efforts and our strivings, waits that great town of peace and of delight. Its white battlements and crystal towers, more real than the mansions of earth, and destined to endure for our great joy forever, beckon us from afar and bid us be brave of heart. One glimpse of its tranquil and unending joys, can console us for any bitter day. Only the thought of what is kept for us in heaven, will assuage all the weariness and sorrows of the passing world.

It is a great gift of our faith that we can always, from any point in our earthly journey, lift up the eyes of our spirit and look into the city of Heaven. The earthly wayfarer, far off from his goal, is content to think of the city to which he is going. So to the eyes of our faith, heaven may always be present and near. It is no fiction of the fancy, no insubstantial dream of longing poets, this city of our peace. God Himself has vouched for its reality, and we have His word for its beauty and its joys, which eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor hath it entered the mind of man to conceive. Every step of our earthly way can open up for us new vistas which end

in heaven. From any rudeness of the path or steepness of the ascent we can turn our eyes upon the City of Peace.

The reality of heaven should mightily console us. Perhaps we may have traveled far and seen many cities of the earth, perhaps again our ways have lain in a narrow circle and we have visited scarcely any of the great centers of human life and of history. Yet we are very sure that those famous towns do stand, and we know much of their beauty, their interest and their variety, from what we have seen in books and pictures or heard from travelers. Paris with its fair boulevards and its historic churches, its parks and palaces, is very real to us; London, great and substantial, with its fogs and towering piles, its crowds and traffic; New York, immense and new in comparison with the cities of the ancient world; Rome, richest in Christian antiquities; Bombay, Peking, the cities of the ancient East—there are few of us who have seen all these, and yet we know with certainty that they exist. By authentic testimony we have been taught their place and their history, and we are sure that traveling in such and such a direction for such a time, we should come to their walls.

With even greater certainty, for the witness of God is surer than the testimony of men, we are assured of the existence of heaven. We have the

word of God Himself as warrant that our heavenly home truly exists and that it will endure forever. Traveling in the way of God's Commandments and for the time that He has appointed us to live, we shall surely come to the gates of that everlasting city of exceeding peace and joy; and if we are friends of God we have already a place within its walls, and an immortal mansion is there made ready for us. The cities of the world rise and fall, and where this generation sees the splendors of life and of art, great buildings and mighty populations, another age shall come to gaze on mournful ruins, and speculate on the vanished life of our great cities, as we do concerning Sidon and Tyre and ancient Athens and classic Rome. But the walls and battlements of heaven, not built by human hands, will never fall to ruin. So long as God is God, through the limitless ages of eternity, we may look forward to a life of joy and peace in that celestial city where the eternal Goodness and Power will call into play the endless resources of His omnipotence to make us happy. From every height and hollow of our mortal ways we may catch sight of those sparkling towers that beckon us on to the Town of the Peace of God.

There is not a step that we take along the paths of God's service in our life's long journey, but brings us nearer to heaven. There is no single little

act of goodness, but sets us just so much forward in the road of supernatural merit that leads to the gates of that dwelling of delight. Time, so relentless in his flight, carrying us forward so swiftly, is only hurrying us toward eternal joy and peace and glory. If God permits us sometimes to be severely tried, tempted, cast down, beset with sorrows, it is because these hard paths lead to heaven.

Courage and strength and cheer will come to us if we learn the secret of the saints, to walk the ways of this life with our eyes fixed on heaven, looking forward, with humble confidence, to our unending home. Incomparably greater than the passing solace of looking forward to better days in this world, is the deep consolation of anticipating that peace and rejoicing which will never end. The ills of this life, its labors, pains and sorrows, are of their nature passing. They cannot stay to try us, they flow away with the stream of time, they are but fleeting incidents of a life which itself is fleeting. But we can gaze onward and see, as the end of all, a peace that must endure forever. Just as it is the nature of earthly things to change, so it is the nature of heaven always to continue. Here we are in trials and labors, there we shall be forever in rest and glory and delight.

We must teach ourselves, therefore, when life is hard and our feet are weary, to look forward past

all the bounds of earth and of time, and fix our eyes on heaven. We must practice a lively faith in that good to come, for which we have the promise of God Himself that He will give it as a reward to those who love and serve Him. Could we even dimly realize the delights and lasting glory that will be ours in that new Jerusalem, we should be able to walk lightly and cheerfully through the rudest ways of our life's pilgrimage. For, as St. Paul assures us in a much-quoted and most memorable passage, the sorrows and pains of this life bear no proportion to that glory to come, even if we ourselves should have to bear them all. As we look forward to heaven, both the joys and sorrows of this life dwindle away. Its passing joys lose their power to allure us, its sorrows discourage us no longer, for we realize that we have not here a lasting city and we look for the things that are to come.

ETERNITY

WORDS, of course, stand for ideas, but there are some words whose immense content of thought we can never fathom in a lifetime of study and reflection because the idea for which they stand is vast beyond all our powers of comprehension. One of these immense and overpowering words is—"eternity!"

All our experience, during our life on earth, has been with time and with the things of time. Our soul, though it is immortal and therefore destined to be a citizen of eternity, has so far always been subject to the limitations of a life of days, hours, moments, and has consequently no experience of that manner of being which it is eventually to enjoy forever. Therefore, it is hard for us to realize the vast and staggering significance to us of this great word "eternity." Yet it is of extreme importance to understand its meaning, for very soon we shall be in the midst of the reality which this term now so feebly expresses for us.

We shall live forever! When we read or hear these momentous words, a tremor of awe may well shake our inmost soul. We, you and I and all the innumerable millions of mankind, past and present

and to come, shall exist forever, essentially the same as we are now, beings of conscious individuality, with our body and our soul—shall go on living, not merely for a million nor for a million million years, but, literally, forever! We may each lay our hand upon our breast and say: "I, with this body that I now possess, with this soul that now animates my body, shall live a conscious and individual life forever and forever. This person who is I, this individuality that I am ever aware of during all my waking hours, will never cease its self-knowing and percipient life throughout all conceivable and future ages!

The mind reels, the imagination grows dizzy and utterly fails, when we endeavor to conceive the meaning of eternity. We are so accustomed, so chained down and shackled to the conditions of time, that the intelligence must use its keen powers of abstraction to conceive an existence in which we shall be free from the decays, the wastings, witherings and fallings away of time, and possessed of an existence that is of its nature not perishable and rushing to destruction, but essentially unending and destined to endure forever. When the imagination, tied down to time and fed on the things of time, endeavors to picture to us the nature of an existence that is eternal, it merely heaps vast terms of years on years, millions on millions on millions of ages, and then

grows faint at the endless vista of its own conceiving.

Ingenious aids have been devised to aid us to realize in some faint way the meaning of eternity. One hears them sometimes in the course of retreats, when this solemn subject is considered. Thus, one time-honored illustration runs: "If the whole universe were a vast ball of steel, and if every hundred years a tiny bird were to come and brush its surface with a downy wing, how long! how interminably long, it would be before that gentle friction would wear away the whole huge, stubborn bulk of steel! Yet, even then, eternity would scarcely have begun!" Again: "If one were to draw a line an inch long, and make that length represent a million years, and then were to extend the line beyond the limits of the world, beyond the sun, beyond the universe, with each inch of that inconceivable distance representing a million years, such a huge duration would not measure even a moment of eternity!"

Theology, with its brave efforts to reach the very limits of human intelligence of the divine, has thus phrased the eternity of God of which our own eternity is the copy and shadow: "The full and perfect possession, all together, of life unfading." We faintly conceive, as in a glass and darkly, that full, glorious, perfect and comprehensive life, en-

joyed not by moments and hours, but all together with every possible fulness, and not changing, waxing nor waning as the moments pass (as is the case with our puny existence on this earth), but unfading, undecaying, unchanged as long as God is God!

In their truest and completest sense these splendid words are only verified, it is true, in God's own incommunicable and infinite Being. But we ourselves, in eternity, shall according to our nature partake in God's unchanging, full and glorious life. We, too, shall have, by His mercy and all-power, "the full and perfect possession, all together, of the life unfading" which He has prepared in heaven for those that love Him.

Again, a poet has endeavored to express his vision of eternity. We quote from memory:

*I saw eternity the other night,
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright.
And round beneath it, time, in hours, days, years,
Driven by the spheres,
Like a dark shadow whirled,
In which the earth and all its train were hurled.*

If we ponder these lines and endeavor to conjure up the vision of the poet, they do indeed help us to conceive the reality that we call life eternal. Eter-

nity is like a great circle without end, of calm and pure and endless light, where there is "the full and perfect possession, all together, of life unfading," without change nor the fear or shadow of change. And time, like a restless shadow, whirled in the ceaseless rush of hours, days, years, whirls beneath the calm circle of eternity, coexisting with it, surveyed and dominated by it, but not disturbing nor annoying the repose of that ceaseless existence, of that full and perfect possession of life undying.

It is very pitiful that we are not more stirred and helped in our daily efforts in God's service, by the thought of eternity. This is a strong thought, a strength-giving thought if only we would have the industry to ruminate upon it and to make it part of our realizations. We have constantly to struggle against the attractions, the pleasures, the allurements of the world, and we are constantly subject to the illusion that these things, flattering as they are to our lower natures, are the substantial good things, the worth-while rewards of life. The world and the flesh and the devil trade upon our credulousness by offering us the kingdoms of the world and their riches as though these things were to last forever. The realization of eternity strikes the scales from our spiritual eyes and lets us see how utterly worthless and passing are all the goods of earth, even though we ourselves could possess them

all. All the deceits of Satan, all the illusions of our own pride, vanity and sensuality, crumble and fade into their ashy vileness like the apples of Sodom at the breath of that awful word, "eternity!"

We are so near to eternity! A thin and falling wall, the slender barrier of our earthly life, is all that separates us from that Great Reality. We walk always upon the very brink of eternity, and no one can assure us that the next day or the next hour will not bring the summons to cross the thin line between this life and the life eternal and to stand in the presence of that all-wise and all-just Judge who will determine, or rather who will declare for us how we ourselves by our actions have determined, our eternal destiny. The solid lines of the things around us, the firm curve of earth and the abiding vault of the sky shall, at some undiscoverable instant, waver and break to our soul's vision and reveal to us the amazing nearness of eternity. Death, so little realized, so rarely understood, will soon rend the veil that now keeps us from seeing that time and all its pomps, affairs and riches are really as nothing, and that the one abiding reality is the life eternal.

There is an immense consolation, amid the sufferings and anxieties of this life, in the thought of eternity. The swift stroke of death brings, to those who are friends of God, a sudden peace. From the

whirling shadow of time, from the weariness of body and vexation of soul that plague them here, they come suddenly into a bath of peace and rest. And even though their sins unatoned for send them for a while into purgatory, yet that fiery ordeal is only a dark vestibule to a glorious eternity. Who can conceive the joy or who can comprehend the peace that come to the blessed souls who are safe in God's heaven for all eternity. That word, which to us has so much of mystery and fear, is for them an assurance that no fear nor pain nor lessening of delight will ever come to them for all the ages of ages. God Himself has wiped the tears forever from their eyes. Their eternal bliss shall last while God is God!

The too, most moving, most stirring thought, the bliss of each single one of us in eternity shall be the exact result, according to the exquisite measure of God's justice, of our actions now in time. Day by day, according to the degree of our love of God, our faithfulness in His service, we are determining for ourselves the precise point of glory, height of knowledge, refulgence of beauty, depth of the comprehension and the love of God we shall enjoy in the mansions of eternity. Every meritorious action done in the grace of God, will lift us so much higher among the eternal choirs. Every opportunity lost for merit here, means so much glory gone from us

for eternity. Striving to realize these things, shall there not come to us something of the spirit of the saints, who despised all things save in so far as they concerned eternity? "What has this to do with eternity?" was often on the lips of that young prince, Aloysius of Gonzaga, who had given up his patrimony here for the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven. The world, this life, all we can have or hope for here, are only precious in so far as they can help us when we use them or lift us when we trample on them, nearer to a glorious eternity.

If we even feebly comprehend the meaning of eternity and the nothingness of all earthly things except in so far as they make for a happy eternity, we shall be able to look much deeper into the providence of God, though that inscrutable and dear mystery is hidden from our fuller comprehension until the dawn of eternity itself. For all that God ordains and permits in this world is done and permitted not with the narrow wisdom of time, but in the wide and infinite wisdom of eternity. Viewed in the light of time, the world might seem a hopeless snarl of wickedness and evil. The innocent are oppressed, the weak downtrodden, the unscrupulous triumph, the conscientious often are overborne. Good men meet with misfortune, wicked ones are sometimes happy—why does God allow things to go so utterly wrong at times? The answer is in

eternity. There all things will be seen to have worked for the glory of God and the good of those who love Him.

So that the thought of eternity is at once a consolation, a warning and a clue to the strange riddle of life. We are to go on hopefully, confidently and yet fearfully, working out in this life with God's ever-present aid, our glorious eternity. We shall be kind to those who are walking with us on the road to God's kingdom, for they shall be our companions for all ages; charitable also to those others who now seem to us to be bent toward perdition, for their conversion may be one of the joyful surprises of eternity, and they may come at last in God's wonderful providence to merit a higher place than we in heaven. Thus, with the light of eternity upon us, we walk safely and swiftly through this valley of shadows, thinking upon the light and the joy to come. For soon the solid scheme of things that now holds us so firmly, shall be broken for us by the hand of Death. Then we shall find a sudden door to escape forever from the tyranny of time, to mount to our judgment, to cleanse our weary souls in the healing bath of purgatory. Then we shall enter, please God, into the mansion of our eternity, where eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor hath it entered the mind of man to conceive the joys that God has prepared for those that love Him!

THE MIRROR OF THE PASSION

A SCENE or an event is often more vividly and movingly represented to us in the description of another, than if we see it with our own very eyes. Some gifted persons have such a keen apprehension, such a swift and powerful imagination and so splendid a power of throwing their impressions and their comprehensions into burning words of eloquence and feeling, that their telling of an episode moves us more powerfully than the episode itself. Through their eyes we can see more vividly than with our own.

It is often said that we get from an experience or a sight, what we bring to it. We take profit from the things we see and experience, in proportion as our own apprehension is vivid and our own minds are keen. Keeping these considerations in view, we may discover how best to appreciate, to realize and profit by the most sacred passion and death of Christ Our Lord. The saints have outdone themselves in ecstasies of earnestness when they tell us of the preciousness of this appreciation of Christ's holy

passion. The passion is, they say, a book of all-heavenly wisdom, wherein one can read in flaming characters the love and mercy of God and His justice, the dreadfulness of sin, the nothingness of life, the values of eternity.

In the passion, God's love is shown for men in the most convincing and appealing way. If we can do no more than read the meaning of the crucifixion, we shall learn all that we need to know of life and death and eternity. But we are thoughtless, weak and inconstant. The eternal Lord of Glory has made Himself man for our sake, has lived to suffer and expiate for our sins, and finally, in an excess of mercy and pity, has mounted upon the bloody Altar of the Cross, wrestling with death and hell for weary hours, and dying at last an outcast of God and man. He was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins, and the punishment of our guilt was upon Him. We know all these things, but we never have realized them. We believe, but we do not appreciate these truths. The sight of the cross moves us, indeed, but not so much as is fitting. We are so blind and dull of comprehension, that even the appalling tragedy of Calvary goes above our heads and we cannot comprehend it.

To whom shall we go, then, to interpret to us the holy passion? Who will teach us to read this book of books, wherein all heavenly and earthly

wisdom are synopsized for us? Through whose eyes shall we see aright the sufferings of Christ? For answer look upon the Mother of God standing at the foot of His cross. She, better than any other human being, knows and can tell us the depths and heights of the mercy and sufferings of her Lamb, slain for our sins. If we would understand the passion of Our Lord, let us see it through the eyes of His Mother. She was the constant and close companion of all His sorrows. An ineffable sympathy, a delicate oneness of comprehension, a most subtle interchange of thought and feeling and emotion, bound these two hearts and souls together as no human hearts were ever linked after or before.

The Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary both were most sensitive, tender, affectionate and responsive. There are delicate instruments, which, with the aid of electricity, can make audible infinitesimally faint sounds, so that murmurs and throbblings which would utterly escape our dull hearing, become perceptible and clear by means of them. Even so, the deep recesses, the still whisperings of Jesus' Heart were audible to the Heart of Mary. Even so she comprehended, beyond what we can imagine, every thrill of agony, every start of anguish, which the multiplied sins of men, the vengeance of His Heavenly Father, gave to that adorable Heart. During the long and silent agony of

His hidden life, when the prospect of His sacred passion never left Him, and when all the sins and ingratitude of men pressed upon Him like an ugly mountain, the Blessed Mother suffered with His sorrows and silently endured in companionship with His silent suffering.

We picture that house of Nazareth as a place of peace and contentment, and so it was. But the peace was the peace of excruciating sorrow patiently borne, and the contentment was the contentment of complete resignation to God's holy will, impressing on the soul the symbol of the cross. When, in obedience to the will of His Heavenly Father, Jesus went forth from the peace and seclusion of that holy home to endure all sorrows, and vexations, the misunderstandings of His friends and the fiery malice of His enemies, during His public life, His Mother's heart followed Him and suffered with Him.

Sometimes she walked the dusty roads of Judea in the footsteps of Her Heavenly Son, and it was said to Him on a time, "Thy Mother and Thy brethren are without, seeking Thee." But even when she was not bodily present with Him, her heart and her thoughts, her sympathy and her comprehension always hovered near Him and yearned to shield Him, if it had been God's will, from the cruel insults and agony with which rude men

tortured His Heart, made unspeakably sensitive to suffer for them. Some holy ecstasies, who have followed in their meditations the life of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, tell us that there was a perpetual revelation made to her of all that happened to her Divine Son. This we may easily believe, since their destinies were so linked together. Surely, whatever came to Him was quickly made manifest to her, and so she knew the secret plotting and crafty snares His enemies were weaving against Him. She knew the gathering sadness of spirit, the sense of betrayal which He felt when denied by His friends and deserted by His followers.

Through all this immense weariness and sorrow, her Heart followed His Heart to the end of His public life, and she knew, assuredly, when one of the Twelve betrayed Him, and saw His Sacred Heart, wounded and aghast at the treason of a man whom He had chosen for an intimate friend. If she was aware of and could follow all His sufferings during His life, how close and exquisite must have been her sympathy and knowledge during the hours of His passion? While He, in dryness and desolation, sweated blood in the agony of the Garden, she, in a similar agony, must have felt her whole being tortured by the sorrow of her Son. She came and stayed as near as she was allowed, to Him during those sad moments that seemed years of anguish,

whilst He was tried unjustly, condemned most wrongfully, made the sport of the brutal soldiery, scourged, crowned with thorns, and laden with His cross.

How every blow, every insult and jeer pierced her heart before it reached to His! How the sharp shriek of the whistling scourges cut to her soul before the heartless blows tore His tender flesh! The jeers of the Roman soldiers and their brutal insults wounded her soul while they outraged His Sacred Majesty, and when that last cry of rejection, "Away with Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" burst from the lips of those who were His own people and the recipients of His gentle mercy and kindness, it broke her Heart even while it tortured the Heart of her Divine Son. During the Way of the Cross she was as near to Him as she could press, walking forward through a dry and terrible desert of agony and dereliction. Bravest of the daughters of Juda, more strong than Judith, more courageous than the mother of the Machabees, she stood beneath the cross when all His disciples save John deserted Him, and she bore with Him those last hours of dereliction until through the deeps of her agonized heart rang loud that final cry of anguish: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

It is no wonder that the Church hails our Blessed Mother as the Queen of Martyrs. No

valiant soldier of God, dying a bloody death on the sands of the arena, or torn asunder by wild beasts, or perishing in the slow agony of the rack or the swift torments of fire, has endured the tithe of inward anguish which crucified the heart of the Mother of God, while the brutal hands of those whom He was dying to redeem, crucified the sacred body of her Son. Yet she did not turn away her eyes from the awful spectacle of her Fairest of the sons of men become as a worm, and no man, with all His comeliness and beauty taken from Him. She did not faint away; even in the climax of her agony she stood and gazed at Him from beneath the cross, and with a splendid and heroic courage offered herself a victim, in an unbloody but fearful agony, to keep company with the bloody anguish of her Christ upon the cross. It is from her, then, this Mother of Sorrows, this Queen of Martyrs, this most blessed and afflicted of all the daughters of Eve, that we must learn to read in the book of the sacred passion. When you find it difficult to pray; when your heart still remains cold even after the contemplation of the sufferings of Christ, betake yourself to Mary.

Look upon the crucified Saviour through the eyes of His most afflicted Mother. Try to conceive what she experienced, what was her sympathy, her compassion, her share in the agony of Christ. She

suffered more in His sufferings than she could have done in her own person, for she loved him much more than she did herself. When you make the Stations of the Cross, make them in company with this Most Beloved Woman. Kneel with her before her suffering Son, rise with her and look at His bloody wounds, sigh with her over the ingratitude of His persecutors, weep with her over the sins which have slain Him. Especially, in saying the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary, contemplate them with the eyes of the Blessed Mother; behold the Agony of Christ in the Garden as she suffered it with her Son; look upon the Scourging at the Pillar as she saw it, really or in vision; contemplate the Crowning with Thorns and all that mockery as it afflicted her loving heart; see the Carrying of the Cross as she walked near, counting each drop that flowed from His exhausted Heart, feeling each bruise as He stumbled and fell over the stones. Then, at the Crucifixion, stand with that agonized Mother, looking with burning eyes and crucified heart at the great expiation!

Unite with her emotions, join with her prayers, and with her eyes see that ruined Body, that broken Flesh, that Countenance scored with grief, that Head crowned with thorns, and read as she read, the greatness of the mercy and love of God, the rigor of His justice and His wrath, the evil of sin, the

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wretchedness of life, the value of eternity and all that heavenly lore which God has synopsized, wished us to learn and realize from the passion. Our salvation is written there and all heavenly wisdom. We can best spell it out with the eyes of Mary, reading with her in the crimson book of the holy cross.

THE VOCATION OF MOTHERS

“**A**T FIRST I did not realize how important a task was mine,” said a Catholic mother the other day, “when first I began to teach my little child. I confess that up to that time I had a great many ideas about the influence of woman, and had engaged in many active tasks in club life and social service. I was full to the finger-tips of social statistics and could tell you off-hand where every welfare agency had its headquarters and just what to do and where to go to meet almost any civic need. I attended meetings and spoke at conventions and was filled with self-satisfaction when I considered the great future of women in America and all the many things one could do to help along the Church and the State. Then, one day, as my little one grew older, I suddenly began to think of the supreme responsibility that I had on me, of bringing up this little child.

“Here was a life just budding into consciousness and conscience, with habits forming and character taking shape. I could see the swiftness with which

the little mind was developing, and her wise sayings and the precocious questions warned me that here was a task indeed to train the young thoughts aright and plant truth and wisdom before the world had its way with error and folly. And that little will! How it appalled me sometimes to see how strong, determined, obstinate it was getting! Certainly sometimes my own will, mature though I am, was barely a match for it. Then I saw habits forming, little ways and tricks of action, small, almost imperceptible beginnings of this or that good or evil characteristic, and it startled me to think that these faint beginnings would so swiftly harden into habits and become almost impossible to change.

"So I gave up speeches and papers and conventions, excellent though I knew them all to be, and let the world wag on a while without my aid while I devoted myself quite intensely to what now seems to me one of the greatest tasks in the world, to bringing up that child. Though I am solicitous and careful, and though I think I do not consciously leave anything undone to encourage and train, to develop and guide that beautiful little life which is just in the making, I always think to myself when every day is done, how many parts of my great task I have left incomplete, and wish that I myself were better and nobler, so as to give more and deeper training to my child."

Wise and significant words, and they express the thoughts and feelings of many mothers. The upbringing of a child, its training in all that it should be and know, is one of the most splendid and the most difficult of human duties. It is a task of infinite delicacy and vast importance because in the early years in particular, the child is so susceptible to good influences and evil. Even a small mistake in the beginning is too sadly apt to mar a disposition or even ruin a life. There are those who say that a child's character is formed in great measure before it reaches the age of reason. A strange statement, to be sure, and yet it has a groundwork of truth. The small habits, the selfish tendencies, the inclination to be stubborn, to do its own will, the tendency to get everything and give nothing up, the insistence on its own way, good or bad, which one sees sometimes in a little child, are in reality often the beginning of a stubborn, disagreeable and selfish character through life. A child may come to the age of reason and begin to realize its responsibilities only after the unwise indulgence by its parents of its whims and fancies, has already spoiled its disposition, and has sown the seeds of selfishness and self-indulgence even before the child was aware.

How extremely important are the first years of conscious life for the child! Its mind and its will are then excessively sensitive to every influence.

One sees how the child of refined and gentle parents becomes instinctively gentle and refined by a sweet contagion. On the other hand, one notices with sorrow how soon the little waifs who run wild in city streets assume that precocious wildness which all their environment is teaching them hour by hour. To watch over such an endlessly precious thing as the soul and heart of a child is, therefore, one of the most momentous tasks which can be entrusted to human nature. It is exceedingly advisable that much should be said, and much thought, concerning this work of mothers.

There is too little guidance for those entrusted with the formation of the character of a child. Too few books have been written for their instruction, too seldom one hears sermons or addresses which deal with their problems. Too little encouragement and praise is given to those who have greatly succeeded in this supreme task. Yet, there seems to be a quickening nowadays of the appreciation of noble achievement in the upbringing of children. We have movements, Mothers' Societies, Mothers' Day, which are at least efforts in the right direction. There are signs of a striving to awaken public appreciation of the services which mothers render. The great mothers may not, themselves, have been eminent or glorious in life; they have never, perhaps, written great books, nor made great ad-

resses, nor ruled with a wise and general sway. But in a quiet way, with much self-sacrifice, at the cost of infinite care, with generous fidelity to duty, these mothers have effectively trained their children to be good and great.

There is a worthy tendency nowadays to search out and applaud the mothers of illustrious men. There is a rising inclination to decorate the achievements of mothers and to acknowledge, at the true source from which it springs, the greatness or the nobleness of their children. If one could search the hidden ways of history and could find the very beginnings of the eminence and of the goodness which it chronicles, one would have to pass through many devious ways and spend weary hours in exploring the hidden springs of character and nobility. But through rough ways and plain, one would be led along the years back to the cradle, and would find that the goodness and greatness which have blessed the world come, in most instances, through the training of a devoted and prudent mother.

SUPPOSE THEY DID

THE Golden Rule, to do to others in all things as we would be done by, is extremely practical and easy of comprehension. Our Lord formulated it for us with most beautiful clearness, and gave as well some notion of its importance, when He bade us: "All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law and the prophets." The whole of our duty to each other, all the observance of the law and the prophets, is condensed into this superexcellent maxim, to deal with others in all ways as we should like them to deal with us.

It is a precious rule, a golden rule, because it is at once so practical and so simple. It proceeds also, most conveniently, from the better known to the less familiar; from the things we find it easy to estimate, to the ones that are difficult and perplexing. We all know, quite definitely and clearly, just how we should like to be treated by others, but we find it very hard sometimes to remember how we ought to

act toward them. The Golden Rule handily reverses the ever-present measure of how we should like to be done by, and makes it the standard of how we should act to those about us.

It is amusing sometimes (we should at least have the grace and the humor to laugh at ourselves), how accurately, completely and correctly we judge, estimate and decide on how others should rightly act toward us, and how mindful we are of even their least duty toward us. Even on points in which we are particularly deficient toward others, we are great sticklers for a full measure of what is due to us from them. In fact, we are rather more sensitive on just those points in the conduct of others in which we ourselves most offend. Nothing hurts our selfishness more than to suffer from some one else's; the rude are most heartily shocked at being treated rudely, and when we are in bad humor ourselves the last thing in the world we can endure is some one else's testiness. In fact, our astonishment and surprise at the faults of others is usually in just the reverse ratio to our regret and shame for our own. We are clear-sighted when it comes to seeing what others should do for us, and dim-sighted when we consider what we should do for them.

Just here, comes in the helpfulness of the Golden Rule, for it equalizes, by a simple comparison, our spiritual vision. You need not puzzle nor wonder,

it tells us, as to what your conduct to others should be, for the answer is ever with you. You know quite well and see quite clearly, just what you should like others to be and to do to you. Well, then, be and do identically the same to them, and you will fulfil the law and the prophets. In other words, our self-love and self-interest are an excellent measure of what should be our love and interest for others. When you are brought in contact with some one else, ask yourself, "If our positions were reversed, what should I reasonably wish him to do for me?" and then act so, and you shall be very secure.

That is all very well to say, answers our human nature, and very lovely to do if one could realize and remember and had besides the good grace to do what one knows one ought. But in practice there are difficulties. To begin with, things look so different when there is question of one's own interests and the interests of others. It depends so much whose hat falls into the water. You remember the comic situation, which repeats itself under various forms in many literatures, of the man who laughs uproariously at the funny side of someone's hat, knocked off the pier and floating away on the tide, until he realizes that the hat is his own. Then it seems to him that the laughter of the silly fools around him at the sight of a man's only hat drifting off in the water, is the

rawest kind of heartlessness. It makes so much difference who owns the hat.

We need, then, obviously, some help to enable us rightly to apply to our life of every day this Golden Rule, which also turns to gold all to which we apply it for God's love. Let us see if it will not greatly clarify our duties to others to ask ourselves, sincerely and without reserve, how should we like it if others acted toward us precisely as we act toward them? To be of effect, this survey of our way of treating others must be pitilessly candid and without disguise. Honestly, now, suppose tomorrow everyone you know should begin to treat you precisely as you have been in the habit of treating others, how should you like it? One could make an amusing tale, perhaps, by vividly imagining the result. How disgusted, horrified even, and surely very, very much surprised we should be, if we awoke tomorrow to see our own pet and cherished failings toward others reflected in their dealings with ourselves. What an extremely disagreeable world it would be—for, remember, it is the failings we have ourselves, that most displease us in others.

There is—not to pry too deep into our foibles, which however we, as we read, should search out with an unsparing hand—there is that preference we have for having our own way. We are a positive character, so we are. Mother, for example, has a

great deal of giving in to do when we are around. In fact, we have so long and perseveringly insisted on having our own way, that Mother has given up long ago having any preferences on certain matters, because she knows that for the sake of peace we shall have to have our way at last, and it is better to yield betimes and save a controversy. But suppose, tomorrow, Mother should awake with just that self-sufficient and bumptious resolution to have her own way with which we ourselves have for so long been entertaining the household. Whew! what hearts of controversy! Go through the day in fancy, and see what battles, contests, and collisions would make the hours lively. It is clear, then, that we are not acting toward Mother as we should like her to act toward us. By the Golden Rule, our actions are awry. For "Mother," put whomsoever else you have to deal with, and for having your own way, any other fault you favor, and you will have a glass in which to scan your daily deeds and see whether they are as lovely as you could desire.

Then, there are our friends, far away. Suppose they all acted toward us just as we act toward them. Ye dilatory and infrequent letter-writers, take guilty heed! How pleasant it is for ourselves to get a letter in which tidings of those we love are mingled with words of affection and interest. It is no small act of charity sometimes to write the right

sort of letter. We so prefer to get one than to send one! But if everyone were as tardy in answering as we—should we quite like it? Behold your mirror and amend!

If we apply this same little artifice of realization to our dealings with those of other worlds, perhaps it may bring us some keener twinges of our sluggish conscience. The poor, suffering souls in purgatory, for instance—how we forget them and neglect both their great, pitiful need and the close bonds of relationship, gratitude and love with which so many of them are joined to us. A constant, low, pitiful moaning should cry forever in our hearts for all those prisoners of God in the place of longing and expiation. We so easily disregard and forget, for hours on hours, and for days on days, and we can so easily aid them. But suppose that we ourselves have gone beyond into that gulf of atonement and are lying in desolation and exile from heaven, waiting in woe for those intolerably slow dregs of pain to drain away, and those excruciatingly lingering stains to be cleansed, so that we can get to the light of God's countenance and to His embrace of heaven. We look, with hopeful and fearful eyes to earth, to our friends, from whom we can reasonably expect all aid that is possible—and they can do so much!—because they have loved us and they grieve for us. But alas! only an occasional ejaculation, the aid of a

half-distracted prayer, comes to us by the merciful hands of the angels.

Can it be possible—atrocious thought!—that our friends have forgotten? Forgotten to pray for us, when by their faith they know that we must be in dreadful need and that they can help so easily? One can imagine the poignant complaint of our astonished soul. What shall the angels say to us. “Dear child, they are doing as you did when you were still on earth. Believing but forgetting, knowing but not realizing, letting every small interest of the earth distract you from pleading for the poor holy souls.”

If we apply this simple consideration to our dealings with our greatest and dearest Friend, how piercing is the light it can throw on our sad shortcomings in keeping up our side of this most sacred friendship. Suppose, suppose for one moment of vivid realization, that Our Lord treated us as we are treating Him. We are withheld from neglecting our earthly friends and from treating them ill, by the very practical reflection, if by no other, that they will in fact treat us just about as we treat them; and so, by a tinsel imitation of the Golden Rule, we act on the quite veracious but not very lofty maxim: “Do to others so that others will do to you.” But Our Lord is merciful even to the cold and undutiful. Do we forget Him the more easily when we should lovingly remember, because He will bear so much?

Then apply to this friendship also our illuminating reflection. Suppose Our Lord treated us as we have been treating Him? We are in constant and anxious need of His visits, visits of light, visits of grace and consolation. If He forgot us for an instant we should be more miserable than a weanling without its mother, than a lost child. Suppose He thought of us only now and then, when nothing else claimed His care. Suppose He heeded our invitations and entreaties to be near us, to think of us, to love us in our need, only now and then, when He happened to remember and be in the mood. Suppose that He replied to our necessities by saying that it is a good thing, indeed, to help us, but some one else should do it, because He has many other preoccupations and cares.

Yet all these things are precisely what we do to Our Lord. He wants us near Him, often, in the Blessed Sacrament, not for His good but for ours; He needs our aid, not in His own person, but in the wants of His poor, in the manifold activities of His Church, His mystical Body. Suppose He treated us as we treat the missions, as we deal with the interests of Catholic literature, as we help the poor? It will be a piercing and a cleansing thought for us if we answer these questions honestly. And having answered them, we shall be better able to shape our lives by the Golden Rule.

THE PAINTER OF FLOWERS

A FRIEND who was an art student of Paris in the last generation, once told us an incident that is a parable. There was in that day a painter of Paris who had a most excellent and singular talent for painting flowers. He could catch the very soul of a blossom and put its delicate tints so exquisitely on canvas that one would gasp with surprise, thinking that one saw the very flower itself still wet with dew. He could paint fruit, too, most excellently, this old painter, and catch the bloom of a peach or the luster of a plum in a marvelous way. Yet such is the strange perversity of human nature, in all the exhibitions at the Salon he never would consent to put on show his lovely pieces of flowers and fruit, but always insisted on presenting canvasses, most carefully and dutifully wrought, which portrayed historic scenes and human likenesses—a sort of composition for which this old painter had no talent at all.

The consequence was, that while his friends raved over his fruit and flowers, the artistic world

which came to his Salon knew the old man only as a dabbler in portraits and historic scenes. Never, in the course of his long career as a painter, did he win the slightest notice from the arbiters of art in the capital of artists of the world. His friends used to remonstrate with him and beg him to put on exhibition some of his fruits and flowers, but no—he did not wish to show the things that he could do best nor to use the one talent that he had. His ambition and vain desire was always fixed toward a field of art in which he could not possibly attain success.

We see many men and women in the world who are precise imitators of this foolish old painter. We have, all of us, a talent for something. There is some particular thing that we might do excellently well if only we set our minds to it. By careful and painstaking exertion we could really do great service to our neighbor and win great glory in heaven for ourselves by doing, for the love of God, the one particular thing that we are fitted for by nature. Yet, like the old artist, very many of us are perpetually sighing after some field of effort for which we are in no way equipped by nature, and neglecting the field of opportunity which is our very own and for which God, by His gifts, evidently intended us.

Is it true that we could each one of us do some one thing excellently? Yes, absolutely true. With training and self-knowledge and a right estimate of

our own limitations, we could each one of us pick out some field of effort in which we are qualified to shine. It may not be a very exalted or noble form of effort in the eyes of the world. To paint fruit and flowers well, is a rather low form of art and not to be compared with that amazing skill which can fix the subtle expression of the human countenance and call from the past the living scenes of history. But, withal, it is a goodly and creditable thing to be able to paint even fruits and flowers; and since all our actions are made holy by the intention with which we do them, there is as much merit and credit in the sight of God in painting flowers and fruits as there would be in covering the walls of the Salon with gorgeous master-pieces of genre. So, too, in our own lives the thing that we are equipped for and called to do, may not be very glorious and exceptional in the eyes of the world. But the commonplace work of life is even more necessary than its glorious and exceptional achievements; and if we are fitted to do some small and obscure work and do it excellently for the love of God, we shall obtain as much glory in heaven and credit with the saints, as though we had drawn down on ourselves the applause of nations.

It is odd and it is pitiful, to see men and women who are blind to their own best aptitudes, and disinclined to their appointed sphere of action. They

pass by the little, necessary things that they could do exquisitely for the love of God, and dream of accomplishments and achievements for which Providence has in no way fitted them, and which by the utmost exertion, they could do only very badly or not at all. Many broken lives and disappointed hearts are in the world because of the failure of men and women to see, to realize and to seize upon that special opportunity for work and effort which Providence intended to be theirs.

After all, it is not so much talent nor aptitude nor genius that brings success in life, even from a material standpoint. It is rather the common-sense perception of one's own limitations and possibilities, the courage and humility to choose that special work which God has fitted us to do, and then an indomitable perseverance to go on through every obstacle and discouragement and to carry out our little part in the great plan which Providence has made. These are the elements of every-day greatness and achievement. The men who gain success both for the world and for heaven, do so, not so much by reason of brilliant talent or excellent ability, but by discerning prudently what they can do best, and then driving along that one line of effort until, in spite of every disadvantage, they come to the maturity of their powers.

Do one thing excellently, said the old philosopher

of Concord, and though you live in the midst of the forest, the world will wear a path to your door. He was only repeating what the philosophers of old had been saying in different ways for ages.

To discover the one thing that we are best fitted for, to be content with that, even though it be only painting flowers, then to do that one thing excellently for the love of God, is the simple formula of real success in life. Those who are so discontented with their own limitations as to make them an excuse for doing nothing, who will not look about for the thing that God means them to do, and then do it bravely in spite of disadvantages and discouragements, for the love of God, have no right to expect success. For this is the reason why God has put us in the world—to try, not our talent, which He knows, nor our capabilities, which He has determined, but to test our good will and to prove whether we are willing to serve Him in the way in which He desires, even though it be only in the painting of flowers, for the love of God and with a cheerful heart.

RETREATS FOR WORKING MEN

FATHER William Doyle, S.J., of the Irish Province, who was killed in the discharge of his duty as a chaplain in France, and whose *Life* has had so wide a circulation, was an enthusiastic advocate of what may well become a great activity of the Church in the immediate future—retreats for working men. Had his career not thus suddenly been cut off in his prime, he would without doubt have pushed on this work with all his might, at least in his own country. In affection for the memory of such a man and for the sake of the cause itself, we should take up and carry on the idea he so strongly championed, for it offers the solution of one of the most pressing problems which the Church will have to meet in this generation. The power of working men, immense before the war, has been vastly increased by the dependence upon them of the nations for all the munitions and supplies which went to win the late great conflict. Admittedly, the world is sweeping toward fuller and fuller democracy which means the rule of the people,

and the people are in great part the workers. When Democracy shall have come, as come it will, the working man will literally rule the world. This would, at first sight, seem an immense advantage for the Church, because most working men who have any religion at all nowadays are Catholics. Indeed, it will be a tremendous advantage, if our Catholic working men are thoroughly instructed in Catholic principles and know how to apply the age-long and secure teachings of the Church to modern problems and to the struggle for their rights.

A body of fervent, courageous, God-fearing and thoroughly pious Catholic working men can greatly influence, direct and control the rightful movement for the freedom and dignity of labor, and they can withstand the injurious encroachments of socialism as strongly and to as much effect as they would the oppression of capital and the injustice of employers. But we must sadly confess, if we are at all in touch with the times, that our Catholic working men very deplorably want, in many cases, that instruction and guidance which will make them safe leaders and wise counselors of their own class. Numerous as the Catholics are in the labor organizations, they have often not the grasp of principles, the knowledge of ethical standards, the practical hold on their Christian Faith which will make them at the same time bold defenders of their own rights and zealous

champions of the rights of others and of the Church. Catholic principles require to be interpreted, applied, developed to meet the needs of every age. In the Encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, so much spoken of and so little studied and put in practice, we have a good groundwork for the laboring man's guidance in his struggle for right and justice. But thoroughly to equip our Catholic men with these principles is no little task. The great and age-long strength of Catholic faith and principle so far as it is needed to solve the problems of the Catholic laboring man, must be taken from the shelves of libraries and the covers of Latin volumes and put into a vivid, simple, fluent form which the working man can assimilate and make part of his own mental life, and which he can readily apply for his guidance in the strong and sometimes fierce conflicts which he may have to wage for principle and justice.

When one considers the body of Catholic working men in the United States today, besieged with socialistic literature, wheedled by plausible soap-box orators, assailed by all manner of insinuating doctrines which aim at their Faith and mislead their reason; when one thinks again how little instruction, inspiration and guidance some of them receive, from the Catholic side, one is appalled at the greatness of the need and the slightness of our effort to meet it. How, then, shall we bring those principles and that

guidance, which are the Catholic working man's birthright, clearly and practically before him? How shall we give him a grasp of the real weapons which God has provided for his hands, to help and save himself and other working men? .

Lectures are good as far as the men can be got to attend them. Literature is good so far as they can be got to read. The formation of study clubs among Catholic working men would be a very feasible and profitable activity if it were rightly conducted and adapted to their needs. But perhaps the most wonderful and most effective means of raising up devoted apostles among our Catholic workers is through the medium of working-men's retreats. What are these retreats? They are what are called "closed" retreats, where the men leave their occupations for at least Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the week's end, and go to a special house of retreats where they can be quite by themselves, entirely undistracted, surrounded with every help to thoughtful reflection, earnest prayer and careful examination.

There, under the guidance of an experienced Director of Retreats, they come under the influence of that most admirable and potent instrument of advancement in wisdom and grace called the Spiritual Exercises—a series of systematic reflections which put vividly and movingly before them the object of

their creation, the purpose of all they see about them, the right use of creatures, the call of our Master and Leader, Christ, His principles and the ways of His enemies, and that right imitation of Him, which constitutes the true nobility of man upon earth. Thoughtful and serious men, such as many of our Catholic working men are, profit immensely by these exercises and by the prayers, reflections and self-examinations which accompany them. They get a great and comprehensive view of life and of their place in the world, a new sense of personal responsibility and increased zeal and capacity for leadership among their fellows.

From such a retreat Catholic working men who before may have been inclined to yield to the plausible lure of socialism, or who have been indifferent to their Catholic Faith, come out immensely in earnest to fight for Catholic principle, tremendously impressed with their immediate duties as leaders of their fellows, and willing to go to any effort, to make any sacrifices, in order to promote the Kingdom of Christ and to bring to the working man that true and holy independence and dignity for which the Saviour of Men, who was Himself for some twenty years a working man, lived and suffered and died.

How shall we promote these retreats for working men? In a country like this, where everything is

possible, where tremendous resources are at our hand, the obvious answer is, build special houses and put them in charge of zealous Religious, advertise to the Catholic working men of the cities that they are welcome, and invite them to come and make retreats. The first bands may adventure reluctantly and with a sense of trepidation, not knowing what new experience this may be on which they have been induced to enter. They will go in afraid, but come out exulting, and having once experienced in their own person the strength, inspiration, light and peace which comes from a good retreat, they will be the best apostles of the movement, and will see to it that the succeeding weeks' ends are marked by increasing crowds of Catholic working men, applying for admission.

If employers who have really the welfare of their men at heart could be made to realize the benefits of such houses of retreats, there would be no lack of funds to raise them or to support them. Honest employers have little to fear from an honest enforcement of the reasonable rights of labor, but both labor and capital have everything to fear from the lawless encroachments of revolutionary socialism, or unbridled class-selfishness. The working men's retreats will not tend to make the Catholic workers less insistent on their rights, but will rather confirm them in their manly stand for justice, because they

will see more clearly that their rights and the rights of their families come from Almighty God Himself. But the retreats will discourage them from lawless, sudden and violent methods, and teach them what sort of labor unions and what manner of labor propaganda will most swiftly and lawfully bring about the social justice for which every good citizen and, much more, every good Catholic, should be longing and praying.

It is hardly necessary to insist very long in speaking to those who are sensitive to the needs of the time, on the expediency and even the necessity of providing these retreats for working men in every large center where Catholic working men can be mustered. What is practically required is the spirit of active generosity and initiative on the part of Catholics to organize and support in their beginnings the needed houses for working men's retreats. If we can, at a short notice, raise millions on millions of dollars for merely civic or recreational activities (necessary and laudable though these may be), what excuse have we for remaining passive when the interests of the laboring man and, indeed, the whole common welfare demand working men's retreats, and when this tremendous power of the workers, rising like a wave, is so soon to sweep on either to immense good for the nation, or to disaster and discord beyond conceiving.

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We are too much in the habit of theorizing, protesting and expecting. We speak much about the social problem, social justice, the needs of the working man, the coming era of Democracy and what the Church should gain from the increased power of the working classes, to which most of her faithful children belong. But here is a practical, immediate and tested means of bringing actually to pass some of the good things that we hope for. Put a large, well-conducted center for working men's retreats in every great center of trade and commerce. Let it develop, by its weekly retreats, a group of Catholic leaders; keep up their fervor, by organizing them into Societies for the promotion of retreats and for the continuance of the retreatants' fervor, and we shall accomplish the things we hope for and shall be doing, besides, our plain and simple duty—to bring to the Catholic laboring men the needed light, guidance, strength and inspiration in that difficult and tremendous task of leadership, which is their birthright.

SPREADING THE GOOD WORD

QUITE a number of good Catholics, with no especial talent for writing, and, perhaps, without the opportunity for exercising the apostolate of the pen, have nevertheless a sincere though unpractical longing to contribute to the Catholic magazines, or to write a good Catholic book which shall help for the salvation and the sanctification of souls. But do they realize, one wonders, the truly precious opportunity that waits at their hand to coöperate most effectively and meritoriously with those who are engaged in the apostolate of Catholic writing, by helping in their own way to circulate Catholic magazines and books? After all, the act of composition, the mere labor and achievement of writing a helpful article or a whole volume that makes for Catholic interests and is notably useful for the spread and the intensification of the true Catholic spirit, is but the beginning of a good work. The writer has expended just so much time and labor, and he or she shall have a reward in heaven according to the spirit of love of

God and the neighbor, the supernatural intention and effort with which the work was carried through. It is a meritorious work, let us say, and it is over. The article or the book is ready for the readers' eyes.

So the writer's part is done. But if the article or the book is truly adapted to help the cause of the Church and to save souls, a world of meritorious activity now opens up to all who can promote the reading of this work. Whoever is the means of putting the book or article into the hands of those men and women who but for him would never have seen or at least would never have read it, gains a merit entirely his own. He is the carrier of the good word to them. For them, in a sense, he writes the book over again, by bringing it to their attention who would otherwise never have come by it. If someone makes a remark that is wise and helpful to souls, and you, standing by and hearing, store that bit of wisdom in your memory and tell it to some one else who was not there to hear; or if you learn some profitable practice in the spiritual life, some good method of examining the conscience, or efficacious means of fervor in prayer, and tell it to some one else, are you not, for that other, as truly a benefactor as though you had originated the helpful suggestion yourself? In spiritual things our merit for what we give to others

does not depend on whether we have originated it or not, but on the spirit with which we give and the benefit we mean to do to them.

Now apply the same principle to the spreading of a good article or pamphlet or book. If it is you who are the means of bringing it to the attention of another and getting him to read it, you are to be credited with the good you do to him. The writer of the book is by that time far away, engaged in some other task, perhaps for the moment utterly forgetful of the work he did many days ago. Without your intervention whatever there is of profit or information in that book could perhaps by no possibility come to the notice of So-and-So whom you now get to read it. The writer's merit in the matter, whatever it may have been, is gained and finished. If now he were here in your place, he might acquire just so much additional merit by persuading, with a good intention, this friend of yours to read the article or book. But he cannot—it is you, who appreciate the value of the book, who have the opportunity of calling it to the notice of this other man or woman. For them you become, as it were, the meritorious author of the book at least in so far as without your help they never would have found it, and so, in a manner of speaking, you re-create the book for them.

It is rather odd that there is not more eagerness,

even among devout Catholics, for the spreading of Catholic literature. We evidently do not appreciate, as do those outside the Church, the influence of the printed word. Or is it that we imagine that the true religion, having the protection of Almighty God, the help of the Holy Ghost, and its own intrinsic truth and beauty to recommend and promote it, is entirely independent of all other aids? The truth is, that the good message of God must, in His providence, be spread abroad by much the same means as any other good message. The truths of Faith are to be communicated by the same means as any other truth. When we come on any specially interesting or profitable bit of information that will be valuable to our friends, we take pains to send to them the paper, pamphlet, book in which it is contained. We must be ready to do the same thing in regard to the truths of Faith, the information that will help them to save their souls.

The sects that are struggling so hard to increase their membership in our country and to save themselves from extinction, show an amazing industry in spreading literature to propagate their teachings. One goes into the railroad stations in some places and finds book racks filled with newspapers and pamphlets for free distribution on their various 'ologies and 'isms. They have well-endowed bureaus of publication that spread clouds of pamphlets

and leaflets everywhere into the hands of those whom they consider influential or likely to embrace their creed. Their churches have their own "post office bureaus," as they are called, whose purpose it is to mail regularly great quantities of printed matter as propaganda, to whatever addresses they find or have furnished them. Finally, they are pestiferously energetic in getting the books that defend, explain or propagate their creed, into all the main public libraries and branch stations that they can influence to take them on their shelves.

This all indicates that though wrong in creed, they are quite wise in the means they take to spread their teachings. And if, as is the fact, this persistent circulation of printed matter actually induces men and women to join these false creeds and to become enthusiasts for error, what an immense efficacy the same zeal would have if employed for the spread of the truth of Christ, which has the grace of God to recommend it and for which the heart of the world is hungry and its soul athirst? It is sad to think that while error is helped so powerfully by the mighty engine of the press, the truth of Christ is sometimes quite unknown to hungry souls who would most eagerly embrace it if you, let us say, would spend only a tithe of your time, effort, money, in spreading Catholic literature.

There are so many ways. To begin with, there

is the very practical means of having a little lending library of your own. If there are a dozen Catholic books in which you are thoroughly interested, and with whose contents you are therefore familiar, you can do great good, just in the circle of your acquaintance, by lending them from time to time to a friend.

"Here is a book I like very much, I wonder if you would care to read it," you might remark. Quite probably your friend will care, and will be grateful to you for your considerate kindness. "There is a chapter in this book that seems to me excellent. Take it with you, and let me know if you like it," will send another volume of your lending library on its travels. You not only do a service to the Church by these little acts of zeal. You also help your friends, who will be grateful to you for opening these little doors for them into heaven.

Then, there is the method of getting books into the libraries. Those in charge of public libraries are always pleased to receive suggestions. But it is an injustice to them to induce them to buy books that will not be read. So you will be wise to make some provision for putting into circulation the books that are added to the library at your suggestion. This can be done by inducing some of your friends to take out the books and to recommend them to their friends as occasion arises. You may make a

little list of the books, with their library numbers, and pass it about to those who may be interested in reading the books in question. Sometimes the only way to ensure the presence of a Catholic book on the shelves of a public library is to make a present of it to the institution. One would think that more Catholics who are comfortably off, would take this means of helping Catholic literature. After all, to give a book to a public library is rather a noble and public-spirited thing to do, and, besides, the benefit is not all one-sided. The library expends some care and trouble on the book in its turn. It is catalogued, indexed, given a place on the shelves, where many readers may see it—in a word, it becomes the subject of expert study and care that are well worth while the sacrifice the donor has made to send it.

Then, there is the admirable enterprise of beginning a Catholic Free Library in your locality. Really, those who are instrumental in commencing such a work, are building better than they know. Experience has shown that, properly conducted, by persons of judgment and enthusiasm, a Catholic library is a perfect hotbed of fervor, of conversions among the non-Catholic readers, and returns to the practice of their Faith among the Catholics. We remember a conversation with the zealous head of such a library in one of our large cities. She was a lady who had a flourishing business of her own to

attend to, but somehow contrived between whiles to carry most of the burden of a Catholic library in a downtown office building. At its noon hour she dealt out the books to throngs of working girls from the offices and stores, who crowded to get "a good book please" from her experienced counsel. In the morning before business and after hours in the afternoon; she was at her post again, advising, encouraging, pointing out to her faithful clients the books for them to read!

She had the most remarkable instances to give of the results of Catholic reading. Some ten or twelve of the boys and girls who had come to help in her work and had gotten interested in the reading of the spiritual books on her shelves, had developed vocations to the religious life and gone off to become Sisters, Brothers, or Priests.

Besides the libraries, private and public, there are a vast number of other ways of distributing Catholic literature. To re-mail one's magazines to lonely Catholics, to leave one's Catholic paper in a railroad station or on the cars, where someone will pick it up and read it, to have a habit of subscribing for Catholic magazines in favor of public libraries or of public institutions, with the request in the latter case, that they be put where the inmates may have access to them—all these are excellent ways.

If you will only cultivate a lively interest in the

matter, many opportunities will come your way, of doing a good turn here and there for Catholic books and papers. It is only necessary to have your eyes open for tactful ways of calling others' attention to the books and articles you like yourself, and to give them the chance of reading them. Let us repeat the moving reflection, that when you are the means of getting another to read a well-written and effective bit of Catholic doctrine, principles or apologetics, or indeed of anything that expresses and spreads the spirit of the Church and her teaching, you revive for yourself the merit of the one who wrote this helpful and moving thing. You re-create his good deed by passing on the flame of his inspiration, and you practice in a very meritorious way what perhaps you have come to think yourself excluded from by the lack of talent or opportunity—to-wit, the much-needed and ever-timely apostolate of the pen.

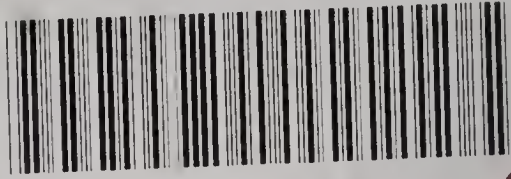
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